Prose Artifact

Essays, Collages, and Ideas

A. M. Palmer

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Books by A. M. Palmer

Inroads: An Urban Park Anthology

Workman's Orthodoxy:
Collected Essays & Poems, 2010-2023

This work is dedicated to the wandering souls
and curious minds
of my fellow nomads.

Prose Artifact

A. M. Palmer Literary Nonfiction, Publisher

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Introduction

The Language Artifact:
Memory as Material Culture

Writing personal essays and memoir pieces can, to some extent, be likened to exploring the contents of a museum collection or a curio cabinet hidden far away from history. As with a physical collection, the artifacts of memory can be examined and interpreted, which is the project of this book and, perhaps, the objective of its readers. So, we begin our journey with a brief philosophical overview of the subject.

With philosophy in mind, much can be said regarding the distinction between the mental and physical aspects of experience. However, for our purposes, we will assume a poetic outlook rather than an analytical one, treating the contents of memory as artifacts in their own right, made tangible by the act of writing or drawing.

Language Artifacts (Essays, Epistles, Photographs, and Collages)

As remnants of the mind, personal essays narrate a variety of themes, often in no particular order, as they move from history and current events to personal reflection with ease. However, we can argue that language itself forms innumerable artifacts, either by utterance or on the written page. After being expressed, these remnants of thought and feeling are then subject to interpretation, which can be an ongoing process of meta analysis, as numerous speakers and writers offer their commentaries, sometimes over decades and centuries. So, this book is a collection of artifacts, the objects of my recent thoughts. Now, we can focus our analysis a bit more and identify certain forms that language artifacts assume, as they become their own sort of material culture, reflecting the societies and periods of time from which they arise.

Essays come to mind first, the act of *assaying* personal observations having been developed by French philosopher Michel de Montaigne, who brought the prose observation to the level of high art. Here, we find variations on the theme of recollection, the personal essay as I have interpreted the form in recent years. One could certainly argue that this manner of using language comes very close to generating material culture of the mind, as I do. However, we might also regard personal letters as expressions of interest, as well.

Correspondence is our richest form of primary source material, bearing witness to the events of history from a personal perspective, recording the nuances of personality and interaction which, quite often, serve to form world events. In letters we find subjective expressions which, over time, become objective materials, taking shape as epistolary collections, being recorded in photographs, and inspiring commentaries from scholars. Even beyond this, however, the tactile qualities of a letter enable it to serve as documentary evidence while also being an object in its own right, a yellowing page filled with the engraved markings of a typewriter or, perhaps, the flourishes of ancient fountain pen ink. Thus, the material culture of memory is created by essays, as well as correspondence, tracing the shape of human relationships and the events of history word by word.

Now, we turn to the subject of photographs, emblems of visual language which are useful to historians and memoirists alike. As critics have noted, a photo captures a moment in time, allowing innumerable questions to remain about the events which precede and follow the image. The material culture of memory is thus created by a photo's unique relationship with time, as it returns the dead to life and preserves buildings now lost to decay. In addition to their value as artifacts and repositories of information, each photo can be transformed into something new, fractured and reconstituted to form of a collage. And this is where the objective qualities of a photo begin to transform into the subjective aspects of recollection. Let's expand on this theme a bit further.

At least to some extent, memories are montage sequences of emotional content, fleeting images invoked by all manner of experiences. For this reason, we include the collage as an aspect of memory's material culture. An amalgam of bits and fragments, it stands as an abstraction, a new image of wholeness created by a collection of fractured parts. We see the edge of a torn image placed on top of cropped pictures, each one declaring its independence while, simultaneously, blending into the whole. Going further with this theme, we can digress to consider a concept introduced by Henri Bergson in *Matter and Memory*, where he identifies the two distinct forms that memory takes. "The past survives as a bodily habit, or as an independent recollection." In the creation of collages, perhaps we have both, the *bodily habit* of cutting and tearing paper which, when practiced artfully, allows the substance of independent recollection to come forward.

Material or Immaterial?

For our purposes, there is too much philosophical ground to cover regarding the topic of materiality versus immateriality, and the degree to which memories can be regarded as objects in their own right. Suffice it to say, however, that writing and creating visual art can render memory in the form of tangible objects, the material culture of dreams and feelings. And it is from this point of departure that we begin our journey.

Essays and Memoir

This selection includes a variety of reflections, most of which pertain to travel and movement through different realms of experience. As a continuum of ideas, this section guides the reader through avenues of language and memories.

Back in 2024, I wrote a feature article on Hopi silver overlay jewelry for *First American Art Magazine* and learned a great deal about a fascinating tradition. I placed this piece at the end of the essay and memoir section as something of a conclusion, as it adds an academic dimension to the previous works. From there, I examine the overall scope of the nonfiction writer's craft in "Personae: Faces of the Essayist."

Theoretical Reflections

Earlier in the year, I began publishing a series of experimental prose works on my blog, a few of which I chose to include here. In this section, I continue with the visual elements of collage narratives while adding prose digressions and a bit of poetry for additional texture.

Image Narratives

From fractured visions to photo essays, this section develops the genre of travel writing and delves into new experiences of motion. In particular, I enjoyed creating the photo documentation of Quartzsite, Arizona, one of my nomadic destinations for the winter months. Desert hues of sand and rock color this region of the Southwest as it descends into economic uncertainty with the rest of the nation.

Puzzle Section

While serving as a park ranger for the City of San Diego, I designed adult education materials which included word search puzzles. I included this section to add a bit of variety to your journey through language and ideas.

Concluding Thoughts

As a writer and visual artist/retired urban park ranger/full-time RV nomad, I enjoy the freedom of expression I find with mixed-genre projects and self-publishing. In creating this book, I collected and revised a number of older writings while, for the conclusion, developing a handful of new essays and collages. Overall, I would define this as an artist's book, being a collection of stories, experimental prose pieces, original graphic designs, and language puzzles, an adventure for curious minds.

As with my previous two books, *Inroads: An Urban Park Anthology* and *Workman's Orthodoxy: Collected Essays & Poetry, 2010-2023*, I designed *Prose Artifacts* to be enjoyed according to the order chosen by the reader. You can begin and end at any point in the book and come away from your experience with a defined set of images and ideas.

With that, I wish you an exciting and enriching journey through the material culture of memory.

A. M. Palmer

Winter, 2025

Essays & Memoir

Tracing the Image of Eve

A Homeless Woman in San Diego

The Voice of Leaves

On a very strange occasion, a woman screamed with considerable power, her voice tearing through the air of late morning. The setting was an urban park, not unknown to unbalanced individuals. Screams, loud cries of sorrow, would erupt on occasion and reverberate through canyon walls and otherwise quiet neighborhoods. Yet, this situation was distinct for its many nuances, and, even now, remains uppermost in my memory. There she was, like the image of primordial Eve, a Cherokee woman of lithe stature screaming at (and through) all four of us, as we approached her through a landscape of fallen leaves.

As park rangers, we were obliged to investigate her unauthorized camp, determining the extent to which social services, law enforcement, and cleanup were needed. Familiar with such scenes, and aware of the dangers they posed, we approached with equal parts of caution and curiosity. Once there, we encountered a tent and some scattered belongings arrayed at the bottom of an embankment, remnants of a complicated life moldering softly. Half a loaf of bread, bits of soiled paperwork, and items of clothing--fit only for our mild climate--lingered in the shade. And the tree where she sheltered was also of interest, an enigma as vulnerable and oddly situated as its tenant--the woman who identified herself as Eve.

Who was she?

Guided by her invented persona, we tried to discover Eve's true identity, unsuccessfully searching databases as the morning expired. The eventual goal was to secure services for her, creating options for a better life--we hoped. At any rate, we deemed it unacceptable--and unlawful--for her to dwell in the canyons of Balboa Park, in San Diego's unmerciful urban landscape. But what was her opinion on the matter? This aspect of the story was more straightforward; after a bit of conversation, it became obvious that Eve was not entirely fit to make life choices, determined, as she was, to subsist on land that offered few edible plants and numerous dangers. But in the course of our encounter, another life came into view. Eve had a two-month-old baby.

After giving birth, she somehow entered the canyons of Balboa Park, electing to forage and seek shelter under trees, proud of her status as a "sovereign citizen." So, on that morning, we faced a complex set of questions regarding individual rights, the stewardship of urban parks, and, not least, child safety. It was quite a strange puzzle, made all the more difficult by Eve's compelling screams.

Through it all, however, Baby Melannie slept peacefully in the arms of my colleague, unaware of the life that awaited her. She was sweet and mercifully unscathed by her surroundings, dependent on a strange array of adults for her safety. Indeed, Melannie was the focal point of our collective concern. But what about the baby's mother, a woman who dwelled quietly in the canyons of our city? More than anything, I recall that she possessed a spirited determination to fight the system.

So powerful was our lady's resistance, that she resembled the image of primordial Eve, mother of the ages--a woman at liberty to roam creation and determine the fate of her descendants. But what about our Eve, a mother residing in Balboa Park, a dysfunctional model of Eden? On that strange day, her portrait took shape before our eyes, a woman of formidable resolve who declined every form of assistance we could offer.

Indeed, six hours later, after the intervention of four park rangers, a police officer, a sergeant, Child Protective Services and a CPS supervisor, nothing was accomplished, and Eve continued to forage on public land with Melannie in her care. In the end, mother and child disappeared into the urban wilds, destined to face a life most people cannot imagine. Even now, this image is tragic and beautiful, like a tapestry with frayed edges.

Epilogue: The Portrait Continues to Emerge

Eve remained a mystery. Here, *The Unknown Masterpiece* by Honoré de Balzac becomes a useful point of reference. As a piece often associated with the Book of Genesis, it fits well with our own story of Eve. With this in mind, we move from the idea of a written narrative to the surface of a painting, the visual expression of Eve and her world.

In Balzac's tale, Frenhofer, the old master, has produced his final work after ten years of labor, the delicate lines of a woman's foot emerging from an eruption of color. Although in conflict with her environment, the woman is, nonetheless, moving forward into her own means of expression, slowly advancing upon the gaze of viewers. The subject of this masterpiece, the courtesan Catherine Lescault, resembles a type of Eve.

Trapped in formless obscurity, Lescault is both captive and captivating, much as I imagine our own Eve to be. And, like the painted image, our Eve hovers somewhere in the midst of things, powerful in her powerless situation and surrounded by innumerable colors. Remarkably, although she must face the dangers of the urban night alone, and provide for her child by her wits, our protagonist evades all pursuers. In her captivity, our own Eve has found an undeniable form of freedom. And with this in mind, all that remains is for us to arrive at our own depiction of this woman, perhaps taking Balzac's story as a point of departure. What might our own creation resemble, taking all the complexities of Eve into consideration?

To trace her image, with accuracy and fairness, is to think back upon the fragrance and sunlight of the morning in question, to recall the sound of Eve's bare feet traversing dirt and leaves, to see the face of her baby, and to feel the power of her scream tearing through us on that hillside.

A Cardinal in the Superstitions:

Reflections on Nature and History

I had never before seen the crested head of the Cardinal in its glory—at least, not in person. Though familiar with the red birds, as most are by way of photos, I had yet to see them darting through morning air or perching in trees, distinguished by their regal bearing. These birds—specifically, the males of the species—contrast the earthtones of desert life, the rock formations and cacti that cover the land, and, in glorious fashion, accent the Arizona sky with their brightness—which is where our story begins.

Although the geologic features and plants here are rich in texture, they grant us a monotony of green and brown. Even when one proceeds into the Painted Desert, colors still blend with grace, rarely emphasizing one region over another. And this is where Cardinals of the Southwest best exhibit their beauty, in my estimation, adding bright color to an otherwise muted palette. I saw one for the first time in the Superstition Mountains.

Arriving from California, and the coastal chaparral of San Diego, I was comfortable with dull landscapes. The ocean was never far, with its raging glories and the sunsets I cherished for their drama. The native vegetation was mainly brown/ gray, however, apart from gardens and cultivated spaces, as well as the beauty of the Anza-Borrego Desert in full-bloom. I look back on my former home with fondness and happily recall my years spent working in this environment. During that wonderful season of life, I was able to learn a great deal about local plants and animals, many of which I recall to this day.

As a park ranger in San Diego, I enjoyed the annual appearance of white pelicans as they migrated for the winter, mingling with the aquatic birds that remained year-round. Then, in 2023, the changing dimensions of life brought me to Southern Arizona. And with that, I found a new appreciation for the Lord's unfathomable power and nature's beauty. The giant aquatic birds have been replaced in my experience by the diminutive and bright Cardinals. And the lessons they convey are compelling.

Indeed, the sameness of our lives can give way as we explore nature. Meetings and electronic interruptions fade before its myriad forms, mountains graced with plants and animals beyond number, vast oceans, and the ongoing illuminations of sun. Upon arrival, I was struck by the dramatic vistas of Arizona, jagged mountains and buttes extending into the distance. I imagined travelers of ages past marveling at the landscape, admiring the environment that would, in many cases, kill them. A sense of hopeless wonder prevails here. If things go wrong, even in the slightest, the end can come with brutal force, no reprieve for the unprepared or the unlucky. Nothing brings this to mind like the Superstition Mountains, a land sacred to the Apache Nation.

Coffee Break Reflections . . .

As one enters the landscape, a sense of distance and thoughts of the otherworldly become palpable, easily giving rise to imaginative speculation. During a coffee break, I entertain creative digressions, transforming colors of the natural realm into the pastel shades of a dream. Then, I return to the moment newly refreshed.

Up the perilous highway of the Tonto National Forest, I drove my class C motorhome one winter. My cat and I were headed for the campground at Tortilla Flats, so named for an event of the 1940s. By the grace of God, stranded workers had survived a terrible flood by baking tortillas, subsisting until the waters receded. Upon visiting the museum and giftshop in the small town, visitors discover numerous photos of Apache warriors and stories of the fabled flood. And lunchtime brings the flavor of outdoor barbeque accompanied by country music, a great draw for throngs of motorcyclists and tour groups. It is a place of sensory overload. Nestled at elevation, deep in the forbidding shadows of the Superstitions, the area is carved out of the mountains. And the floods are terrifying, as a road to the north made quite clear, having filled with snowmelt earlier in the week. Then, one morning, the less welcoming elements subsided, and a Cardinal perched in my campsite.

From the Audubon Society, we learn that these birds are abundant, being emblems for a number of eastern states and familiar to most people. The Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) thrives in diverse habitats, from deserts and woodlands to urban parks and gardens in the suburbs, requiring only dense bushes for their nests and sufficient foraging. Insects and ground vegetation provide their diet. Fed by both parents, nestlings make their way into the world in roughly 11 days, and we find their species thriving from New York down through the lush regions of Mexico. And, of course, they enliven the Southwestern desert with their magnificent color and songs of courtship.

Still in awe of the sheer cliffs and forbidding heights, as my trip continued, Cardinals came to mind as I regarded the mountains and their cool shadows. How strange it was to find elegant shades of red darting through the Superstitions, taunting frail humans, creatures who succumb to the environment like wilting flowers. By contrast, these little birds have no trouble. I consider this as I heat remnants of morning coffee in the shadows of winter.

My trip ends far too soon.

Sunlight of the season rises above the campground, and the perched Cardinal departs as suddenly as it arrived. With that, I pack my gear into the waiting motorhome and head for the highway.

Torn Page

A Stranger's Letter to my Grandmother

Unpacking memories becomes a form of hazardous duty, as questions arise, and a shadow crawls along the ceiling of a distant bedroom. This is the story of my great uncle's house and the woman who became its new owner.

Once, in the quietness of a late afternoon, as I awaited my simmering beef stew, I decided to explore the remnants of my grandmother's life and wonder about its mysteries, the episodes and intrigues she avoided discussing over the years. With that in mind, I walked away from my dinner and entered my home office, reaching up to the highest shelf of a closet, where I retrieved one of her belongings.

Probing a cache of dusty keepsakes, my fingers slowly grasped a small plastic box—of the sort that contains odds and ends from desks and kitchen tables—where a series of treasures awaited me. I had placed it in the darkness of a high shelf long ago, knowing that it would one day recapture my attention. And at the arrival of twilight, on that particular occasion, the box of memories came to mind with a certain insistence.

Then, I opened it.

My discovery yielded several photos and an envelope from the recent past. By the time the artifacts were arrayed before me, there was no turning back from the journey. So, I entered a new landscape of recollection, prepared to explore its steep and rocky terrain.

As for the photos, the images were at once mundane and jarring; the face of my mother staring in sorrow and discontent from the 1970s; a picture of my great grandmother whose history is largely unknown to me; and the portrait of a great uncle, a mysterious figure who drifted away from the American South during the 1920s, puzzling his worried family, only to reappear in San Diego, California, circa 1980. And then, I discovered an envelope addressed to my grandmother, written in a hand I did not recognize. For its lack of familiarity, as well as the inviting texture of its dog-eared corners, the slightly torn page of history became my focus.

I placed the pictures back in their box and removed the letter, smiling at the quaint pattern of flowers that adorned it. The stationary was ordinary to a fault, hinting at the pleasant woman who wrote to friends and family on its pages, a stranger about whom I knew nothing. Then, I began to decipher the cursive before me, the elegant impressions that spoke of another era, a time when words were given more honorable shapes with flourishes and embellishments, all of them unique to the writer's hand. And with each curved letter, I learned something new, details that were private but relevant to a shared history. Before we move in that direction, however, we need to explore a bit more context.

A Strange Place, a Disquieting Atmosphere

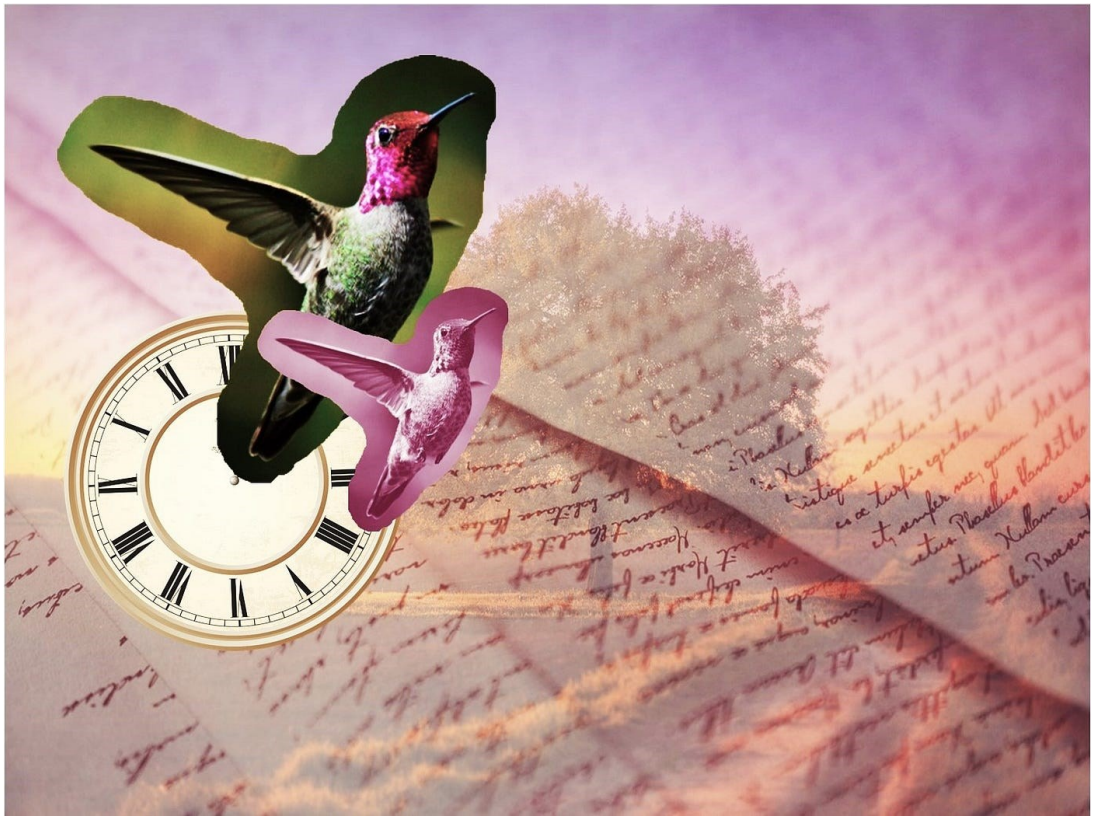
Although the main character of this story is my great uncle's house, my grandmother is very much a part of the narrative. One of his favorite sisters, she maintained a lengthy correspondence with her elder brother—until he simply vanished into a haze of unanswered letters during the early 1930s. We will explore that narrative a bit later. First, let's continue with a digression into my grandmother's story.

Near the end of her life, she agreed to live with my parents and sell her old house on Glassell Street in Los Angeles. At the time, I was attending the University of California, Santa Barbara, and had little to do with her new phase of life, learning about the arrangement from the distance of another city. And this separation was comforting to me in no small measure. The joy of planning and conducting the move belonged to my mother, who would often call me in fits of frustration, complaining about the odds and ends my grandmother had accumulated over the years, many of which she

hoped to retain—including the box that contained the stranger's letter. In the future, my mother would leave furlongs of stuff to me after her death, continuing an odd tradition, but here I digress a bit further—perhaps somewhat too far—into the strange plot twists and shadows of family history. Anyway, let's return to our main story for now, since we have more terrain to cover.

At the moment I found the letter and felt the impression of words penned by a stranger, I recalled my childhood home and my grandparents' house, as well, with its sweet and sheltering influence. And the thought of a stranger's narrative unfolding in our former homes felt endearing and, at once, a bit sad. With that interlude, I reflected on the strange character of time, how its movements are likened to the flight of birds and its secrets conveyed in beautiful penmanship. Beyond the pleasures of remembrance and speculation, however, there was a lesson in this experience for which I am grateful.

The woman reminded me that *my* relatives were not mine alone; they had lives of excitement in the world of yesterday, impacting all manner of people, none of whom I will ever know. So, who was this stranger?



The letter was written by the most recent owner of my great uncle's house, an old structure situated on Market Street in San Diego, California. Back in the 1990s, the woman had traced my grandmother to my parents' address and reached out, quite graciously, with her flowered stationary. As the new owner, she was a bit curious; the house was a rather bizarre place with a disquieting air, and she wondered about my great uncle. And I became inquisitive about the situation, as well. Would my grandmother respond to the letter and shed light on our family history? Moreover, would she reveal herself in a meaningful way to a stranger? We continue our journey with a closer look at my relatives.

From Louisiana to Europe: Further Digressions

My grandmother and her siblings were born and raised in Louisiana, bayou country, to be exact, shortly after the Civil War. There were eight children, the five brothers being a good bit older, all with rather adventurous lives. For now, we will focus on the story of the great uncle mentioned above, an eccentric character who enjoyed taking selfies long before the convenience of iPhones. Interestingly, I found stacks of self-portraits he had taken over many decades, for which he posed rakishly, always with a hint of mischief in his eyes.

And the mysteries abound.

Like the house on Market Street, the rake in question was a bit odd, having moved suddenly to France in 1924 and then to Spain shortly thereafter. We eventually learned that he had married twice, his first wife being Spanish and very elegant in the photos we discovered. In time, they divorced, and he met his second wife somewhere in Norway, continuing as an expat with a fondness for secrecy. Apparently, I have a few Norwegian cousins out there, about whom I know nothing. As for my wandering uncle, I found a letter from the 1940s that established his return to the United States.

Engraved by an old typewriter on government letterhead, it thanked him for his service during the Second World War, the nature of which was unspecified but appeared to be administrative, if I remember correctly. So, we can infer that my great uncle spent a number of years back in the United States, estranged from his family, only making contact during the 1980s. By that time, the three sisters remained but most of the brothers were deceased, all the siblings having been mysterious in their own ways. And some of them seemed downright tragic, their sorrows becoming the whispered embarrassment of family secrets, previous decades being far less enlightened. Even now, I can recall a story I learned as a child, having overheard a few of my grandmother's hushed conversations.

Apparently, one of the brothers experienced some sort of breakdown and committed suicide in Arkansas during the 1950s. His widow gave my grandmother his old wallet for a keepsake, and she carried it in her purse for the remainder of her life. As a child, I would often smell the rich fragrance of the leather as it aged and slowly decayed, wondering about the inscription it bore, the gold letters naming a man from long ago.

As for the details of her brother's sorrow, my grandmother was either unwilling or unable to describe them. The subject was discretely ignored over the years, hiding in the shadow of old photos, resurfacing only when my mother and I could speak in quiet tones. Such were the ways of the past.

I thought back on these stories as I considered the drama of my great uncle's house, feeling intrigued as well as cheated, wishing that someone had kept better records for me to discover. As it stands, I've only ever found a few documents, here and there, on rare and fortunate occasions. That's how it goes with family history.

So, the stranger's letter is something of a portal, a return to the distant past, where questions remain, and answers are subject to interpretation. Really, it was no more than a warm greeting and a request for a bit of historical information. Yet, it somehow conveyed much more. I could tell from the tone that the house was indeed a bit disquieting, and the woman was likely desperate for answers. However, knowing my mother and grandmother as I did, I was certain that they had never written in reply. With that, I found the woman's email address, after a bit of Google searching, and contacted her myself.

Haunted, Delightfully So . . .

The new owner of the house turned out to be a nurse and was quite pleasant, although she did not recall having written the letter. In my email, I included as much information regarding my great uncle and grandmother as possible and asked, discretely, about the woman's experiences with the house. She said that it was *delightfully haunted*, with photos sometimes appearing upside-down in frames, strange noises cropping up periodically—and a troubling stain on a bedroom ceiling that refused to be covered, constantly resurfacing in angry defiance of paint. It took the form of a crawling shadow, like a creature moving strangely through a dream, night after night.

Such was the history of a delightfully troubling place.

Apparently, my great uncle had converted the structure into a boarding house, installing bathroom sinks in each bedroom. I think that might have been the creepiest part. Anyway, the owner invited me for a tour and a chat, and I cheerfully suggested that we meet for coffee somewhere downtown, instead, as I did not wish to visit the house. As it turned out, we lost touch, and no further information has come to light. The house, like the selfies and letters from my uncle, contains the haunting energy of a secretive life—one that remains largely hidden to this day.

Hours flew by as I explored the old box of memories; my stew was nearly ruined. I simply sat transfixed, filled with so many conflicting emotions about people who had died long ago, leaving the messy remnants of their lives as a legacy. My relatives were mine, but only to a point. In truth, they belonged to the world, just as I do, having touched numerous lives before simply disappearing into death, as I will—eventually.

The mysteries we bequeath are precious, lingering to write our stories and keep the generations wondering. They are the torn pages of history that we all share, each family making its own contribution.

Collage Notes:

For the thumbnail of this piece, I wished to create a sense of ambience and mystery while, simultaneously, referencing the letter and its centrality to the theme. To achieve this, I decided to crop and overlay a collection of stock images, using various levels of transparency to soften and blend the elements. If you look closely at the door of the house, you will notice the image of a young soldier, glancing with uncertainty from the First World War. Sometimes the most powerful elements are subtle, remaining almost imperceptible in their relationship to the whole.

Time flies. The softness of a pastel filter compliments the image of a hummingbird, with an old letter and a sunlit hint of greenery adding texture and continuity to the piece. We note here that repeating an image can lend strength to a composition.

For the third collage, I arranged a picture of an old cigar tin, a book, and a bouquet of bright pink flowers on a textured background, all from Pixabay. I used a 30 percent transparency for the cigar tin, placing it over the edge of a cropped photo. By making the bouquet brown and pairing it with the patina of an old book, I hoped to emphasize the historical theme of the essay.

House of the Catacombs

On the Threshold of Hidden Things

The space unexpectedly opened into a vast realm, undoubtedly unnerving those who discovered it, a cave used by people of another time, exquisitely furnished with statuary and networks of tunnels. The owner of an ordinary house in Turkey had begun to construct additional rooms when, by chance, he discovered an extraordinary connection to history, there, beneath his home. Similarly, dwellings on the Island of Malta are said to have doorway access to catacombs; innumerable chambers and labyrinths, long abandoned by their makers, languish underfoot, topped by the island's magnificent beauty. How strange it would be to own such a house, a private space abutted by vast regions of ancient life, a homely kitchen and bedrooms perched nervously over the abyss. Consider the atmosphere in question.

An effective dwelling must shelter as well as comfort those within its walls, being primarily a refuge from the world's hazards, from the lurking criminal who might be deterred by its locked doors, to the dark storms of winter repelled by its roof. Beyond this, a *home* carries with it certain semantic burdens, as it must be inviting and pleasant, while sheltering occupants from noonday heat and the dangers of night. An image of homelife brings to mind a furnished table, the glow of soft light issuing from windows, and flowers of the season gathering moisture outside. The hours of dusk and the arrival of loved ones for a meal complete the picture. This is a home. By contrast, a house—a potentially cold and anonymous structure—can linger over the abyss without issue; it promises physical protection but never the assurance of emotional support or a welcoming embrace. When rains are repelled, and intruders stymied, the house has done its job.

And what about the dwelling that sits, either knowingly or unknowingly, over ancient catacombs? What more can be said regarding its situation as a liminal space, a threshold dividing self from the unknowable other, modern life from the haunting elegance of antiquity? It all depends on the homeowner in question. For some, the ambience of history is not only unavoidable but enriching, as it offers character to a residence and a sense of the unique—not a bland subdivision but a memorial to the ancients or a curio cabinet from ages past. Again, the role of a dwelling beyond its rudimentary functions is truly subjective; personal taste prevails.

Could you sleep comfortably, perhaps with the family pet at your feet, knowing that the cellar door—an old piece of wood barely able to offer separation—is all that stands between you and networks of tunnels and chambers, tombs yet to be discovered, and a history likely gruesome in its explicit details? If you could, I applaud you. Now, let's return to the notion of liminal spaces, thresholds and their greater significance. Here, the idea of order begins to gain momentum, playing off the shadows cast by catacombs, which serve conveniently as symbols of chaos.

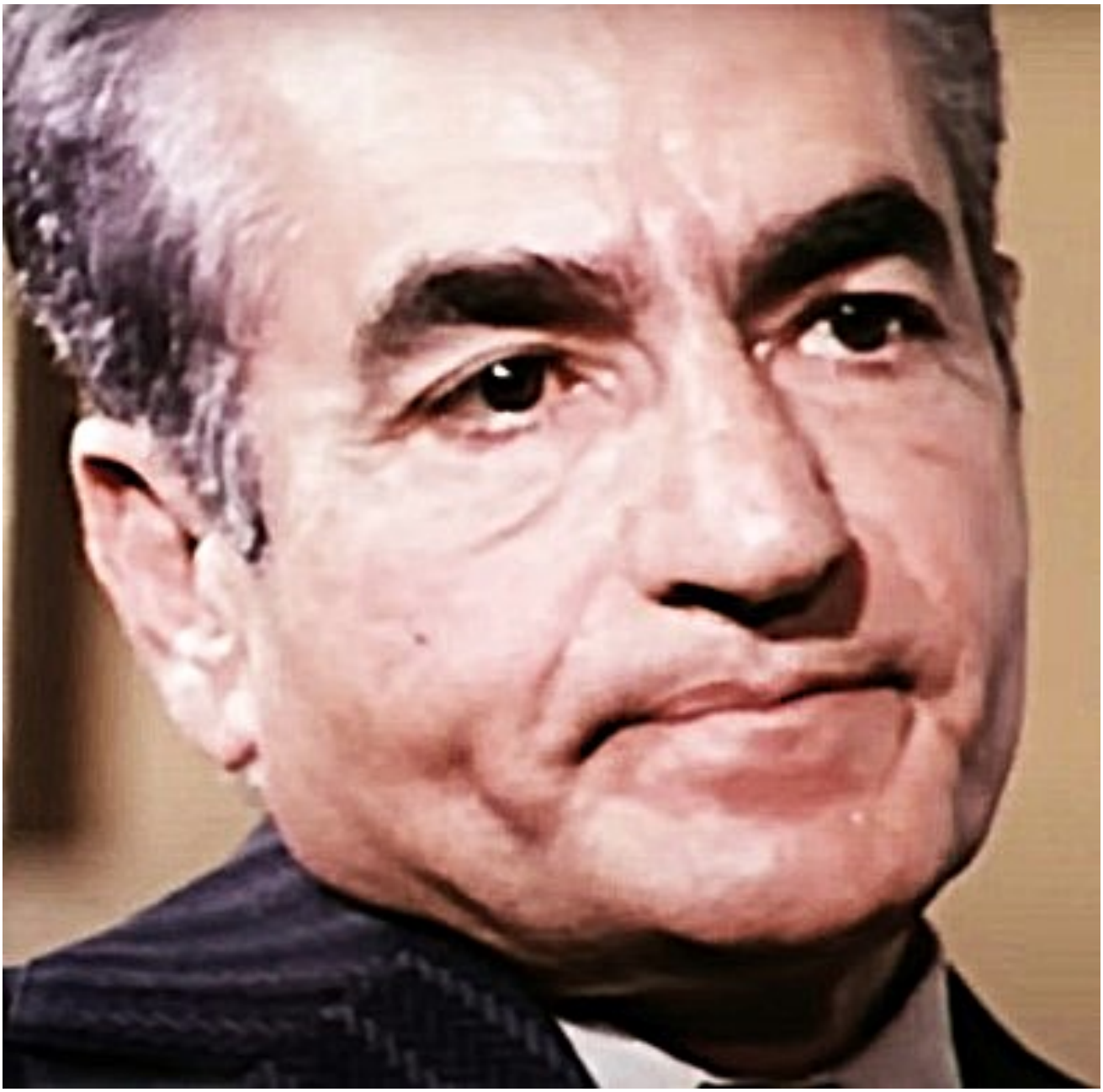
More than providing separation, a transition between the known world and that which looms in uncertainty, the house promises order, a region where predictability overcomes disorder by design, geometry being very much a part of things—a series of angled divisions keeping the family safe at night. In relation to our present subject, the idea of mathematically defined space is interesting. It brings to mind Gaston Bachelard's 1958 book, *The Poetics of Space* and the chapter related to shells.

The snail presents us with rich domestic imagery, its soft form residing in a realm of mathematical hardness; Bachelard reminds us that "Ammonites built their homes around the axis of a logarithmic spiral." In its most effective and pleasing expression, a dwelling's order can repel chaos from the outside world, while manifesting beauty. Along these lines, Bachelard references the writing of Paul Valery, who noted that "A *crystal*, a *flower* or a *shell* stands out from the usual disorder that characterizes most perceptible things" (p. 105). This is one view, amid many others, on the orderliness of natural formations. Yet, in our present study, architecture provides us with a different perspective; the well-designed dwelling—easily perceived for its great size—stands in contrast to the disorder of imperceptible things. And it does so quite convincingly. Imagine a house, the symbol of domestic order, presiding over sprawling subterranean depths, defying shadows to overtake it—*Poetics of Space* powerfully engaged.

Those who came before us left their ritual spaces beneath our feet, amid uncharted caverns and interruptions of darkness. Perhaps the geometry of built environments can shelter us from these depths, as they compete with the splendor of logarithmic shells and the rich aesthetics of nature.

What we can say with certainty, however, is that both the house and the snail's shell serve as points of transition, dividing sheltered space from the world of external uncertainty. In both cases, homeowners must hope that their walls of order will stand against the chaos of time.

As vulnerable as a snail encased in its shell, the human who sleeps above catacombs rests in bed, believing that his well-ordered house will fend off the disorderly intrusions of history. Time, as they say, will tell. From the vantagepoint of personal taste, I've drawn my own conclusions; burial places, as well as sites of ancient ritual, certainly don't offer a sense of coziness and wellbeing. A house of the catacombs, a place of dark transitions and the secrets of history, is not to everyone's liking.



Fall of the Shah of Iran

Memories of St. George, Utah

I'm not sure why, but I vividly recall where I was when the Shah of Iran fell, when restive mobs assumed control, and the glory of His Majesty was no more. It was 1979, and I was a nine-year-old on vacation with my parents, enjoying splendid desert highways in my father's new car, as he and my mother smoked cigarettes and ate rolls of peppermint Life Savers. In carefree fashion, we were heading for the Hilton in St. George, Utah, marveling at the scenery, appreciating bands of color that stretched across innumerable rock formations, the glorious Southwest at its finest.

I enjoyed our vacations, as my mother allowed me to jump on hotel beds with my shoes on and watch Saturday morning cartoons with abandon. Looking back, I suppose the extra privileges made up for the haze of cigarette smoke and long hours on the road, most of which I spent dozing and listening to the jazz albums my father cherished but I had yet to appreciate. Those were the good old days, years before so much unrest made the Middle East its own kind of horror.

At the time, the situation in Iran was little more than another coup. A propped-up potentate, wrapped in gold braid (and decorated with a farcical number of medals) had fallen by the hand of his own people. And the picture was right there on the hotel television, creased with lines of poor reception, and narrated by the voice of an excited foreign correspondent. The old TVs were quite unreliable, images often streaked by annoying horizontal lines and grains of overwrought color, but I digress. Interestingly, one broadcast from that time remains clear in my memory, so many years later.

The Prize in-Hand

On the occasion when mobs stormed the imperial palace, a realm once forbidden to the masses, a young man grabbed the souvenir of a lifetime and posed with delight. Smiling in triumph, the protester donned a military hat, replete with gold embellishments, fine fabric, and a medallion of state, every bit the relic of a fallen empire. As a child, I marveled at the sight and felt a bit envious, knowing that I had no such opportunity to acquire a fancy souvenir. And this is what I remember when thinking back to St. George, Utah of 1979: The Shah's palace became the scene of mob violence, but that hat was amazing.

Over the years, I became more aware of the great political significance involved, as the Ayatollah Khomeini came to power, ushering in an age of terror. Of course, the Shah had done the same, albeit with more flair and luxury. His secret police terrorized political opponents as the royal family waterskied and chatted with European monarchs. Perhaps it was the glittering semblance of legitimacy that set the Shah apart, with his tennis outfits and stunning wife, and, no less, his enthusiastic adoption of pomp and court ceremony. Enacting Hollywood scenarios is a requirement for any stylish monarch, especially those who favor despotism. And the Shah of Iran was a master of the art.

An Imperial Celebration: The Beginning of the End

Born in 1919, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was the final shah, or king, of the Imperial State of Iran who reigned from 1941 until the fall of the regime in 1979. His main political rival had been Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddegh, best known for nationalizing Iran's British-controlled oil industry to the ire of the West. From there, the democratically elected Mosaddegh was deposed, and the Shah (with support from the United States and Great Britain)

assumed centralized control. We all know how that goes. At any rate, his subsidized and brief stint as autocrat gave him an extraordinary opportunity. In 1971, to celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of the empire that gave him his credibility (at least ostensibly) the Shah threw a party--a big one.

As I was only a baby at the time, I don't recall the television interviews that took place in the Persian desert, as heads of state, legions of waiters, food, and rivers of wine arrived for the festivities. Later, I saw an old piece of footage that seems a bit laughable now. Costumed performers pranced in the sun, as Barbara Walters gushed about the elegance of it all. However, there were a few problems with the grand production.

On the night of the state dinner, the receiving line was disarrayed, and monarchs wandered in awkward uncertainty, all waiting to stand before their host, the "King of Kings." Years later, reporters laughed about the line of dignitaries stumbling forward, coughing from swirls of desert sand, a procession that marked a poignant ending, the closing days of an ancient and once formidable empire.

Then, after the bejeweled night, guests returned to their private tents, which were not of the nomadic variety so common to the region. No, these were accommodations of high elegance, with every detail brought to bear for the occasion; personal care items, radios, elegant furniture, and crystalware kept the dignitaries comfortable and buzzing with conversation. However, as the multitude of kings enjoyed luxury, trouble was brewing for their illustrious host.

Although a monarch by lineage, the Shah did not possess true sovereign power. Having forgotten his dependence on the United States and Great Britain, and miscalculating the oil market, the roughly $90 million he spent on a party for fellow elites became an issue--a PR disaster that increased daily by orders of magnitude. And remember, those were 1971 dollars. In today's currency, the bill would have approached half a billion, or thereabouts, a bit problematic for a nation gripped by poverty and the growing influence of radical Islam.

A mere eight years after the party, the King of Kings was fleeing for the tarmac, never to return to his beloved Persian sands or the luxury he once knew. The last Shah of Iran passed away in 1980, having taken up his final residence in Egypt as an exile. I wonder if any of his former party guests came to visit or, in a spirit of reciprocation, invited him for an elegant dinner and snifters of brandy. Anyway, my memory of his erstwhile empire is linked to our vacation in St. George, Utah, by comparison, a rather modest experience of the desert.

An Ascent:
Considering the Shadows of a Stone Staircase

Originally Published in the Adelaide Literary Magazine Awards Anthology, 2018

Somewhere in San Diego, California

If the woods are haunted, but the forest merely enchanted by shadows and soft light, into which realm does the stone staircase lead? And who will follow?

In a different era, as industrial wealth of the twentieth century flowered into great family fortunes, workmen were transported to a distant location and ordered to arrange a pile of rocks. It was an interesting task. Their employers—the founding fathers of our city—were determined to build a grotto in what was then wildland, something of a monument to affluence and ambition, a hint of things to come.

Although, at first glance, it seemed like nothing more than a curiosity, the project had obviously been calculated, its site chosen with something in mind; the location was a place set apart from prying eyes and gentility, a place where the activities of a grotto could go unchallenged and remain hidden—never to be seen in newspapers or history books. Even now, long after the age of discretion and propriety has faded, the grotto remains a significant destination. Although suspicion has given way to appreciation over the years, something of the original aura persists; the structure still engages travelers as they explore pathways and wander in the shallow woods.

Every aspect was designed with care. Gray and orange rocks form not only a fount but also a series of walls and a staircase, steps that gently descend into an entanglement of oaks.

In the late afternoon, a larger vision becomes clear; odd angles reveal how the builders were able to use light, as it passed through tree branches and thick brush, to create an interesting experience; a journey of the mind no less than that of the body. Although the forest of our era has thinned considerably, the experience of traveling through light and shadow remains tangible.

Into the Grotto

Standing at the base of the stairs, one is immediately confronted with a choice; either climb back to the full embrace of sunlight or give way to momentum and continue the descent. Enjoy a reprieve from uncertainty or delight in a new adventure, the choice is yours. In the present era, the impact is less than what it must have been during the early twentieth century, back when the rocks were first arranged. And yet, the shadows cast by the staircase are still compelling, emphatic in a way that the escalators of a shopping mall, or even the steps of a venerable bank building, simply are not. The choice offered by the grotto is not only unavoidable—in that the traveler must either ascend or descend—it's also something of a coy challenge. Are you willing to follow the shadows of an old stone structure? A few interruptions of darkness await you, but they will quickly give way to sunlight and the predictable elements of home. You can climb safely out of the forest and be on your way. Or would you prefer a deeper venture into the woods? Decades ago, when settlers were uncertain about their new surroundings, the experience must have been powerful.

Sadly, times have indeed changed. In the presence of traffic, and in the company of dogwalkers and children at play, the haunting ambience of the grotto is greatly reduced, perhaps returning only at night. However, at the moment of decision—when one must travel either up or down—a quick rush of anticipation is easy to feel, a reminder of the previous century, when the land was far more mysterious.

Even now, the mood of the place is difficult to capture and define. It's as if the grotto is always becoming something different, reasserting itself in the face of history, crumbling slowly but nonetheless remaining defiant and vaguely disturbing.

As daylight fades, and hints of dusk become more insistent, the atmosphere truly changes. At the base of the stairs, sunlight begins to look a bit less capable of rescuing travelers from darkness. And the climb to the top begins to look forbidding. As night approaches, enchantment seems less likely than outright haunting, adventure being more a matter of survival than the experience of enjoyment. Again, from the vantagepoint of the stairs, these sensations become magnified, as the mind prefigures the body's journey. Moreover, the mood of the place serves as a reminder; life is full of choices, many of which are difficult. At some point, before the full arrival of darkness, certain decisions must be made.

As for the question of who will follow the stairs as they beckon, either for an ascent to the world above—or a downward movement into the woods—a quick glance in any direction provides an answer.

The Visitors of Night

Empty whiskey bottles and beer cans, graffiti and the annoying presence of food wrappers have all converged on the old grotto, as if to challenge its claim to a mysterious past. The question of who follows its path is easily answered. At such moments, introspection can quickly transform into a feeling of grief. On one occasion, however, I was offered something more.

As I began my ascent, and tried to clear my mind of the inviting yet disquieting spirits of the place, I realized that I was not alone. It was a strange moment. I paused very close to a patch of graffiti—glaring red streaks of paint that reduced the grotto to a mere neglected ruin—as two people approached me. They were teenagers, a loud, enthusiastic boy and girl making their way through the afternoon. Both were laughing and sipping from plastic cups, the boy playing music on his phone, the girl texting on hers. They were moving with the ease of childhood, perhaps smiling at the rapid approach of their adult responsibilities. I smiled in return. We passed each other in the awkward manner of travelers who meet while going in opposite directions; they were heading to the base of the stairs I had just left. As they reached it, I glanced down and met the boy's gaze. It was the familiar expression teenagers give to adults who are neither their parents nor teachers, but authority figures nonetheless, still capable of chastising them for their intimacy or demanding that they turn down their music. I did no such thing. My attention was elsewhere.

Although the day had been bright and warm, the air had recently begun to chill, and shadows had grown among the oaks, engulfing spaces that seemed to welcome the arrival of night—a sudden change in the mood of things. I wondered if they had noticed.

Insidious Persuasion

Regarding Three Photos of the Reverend Jim Jones

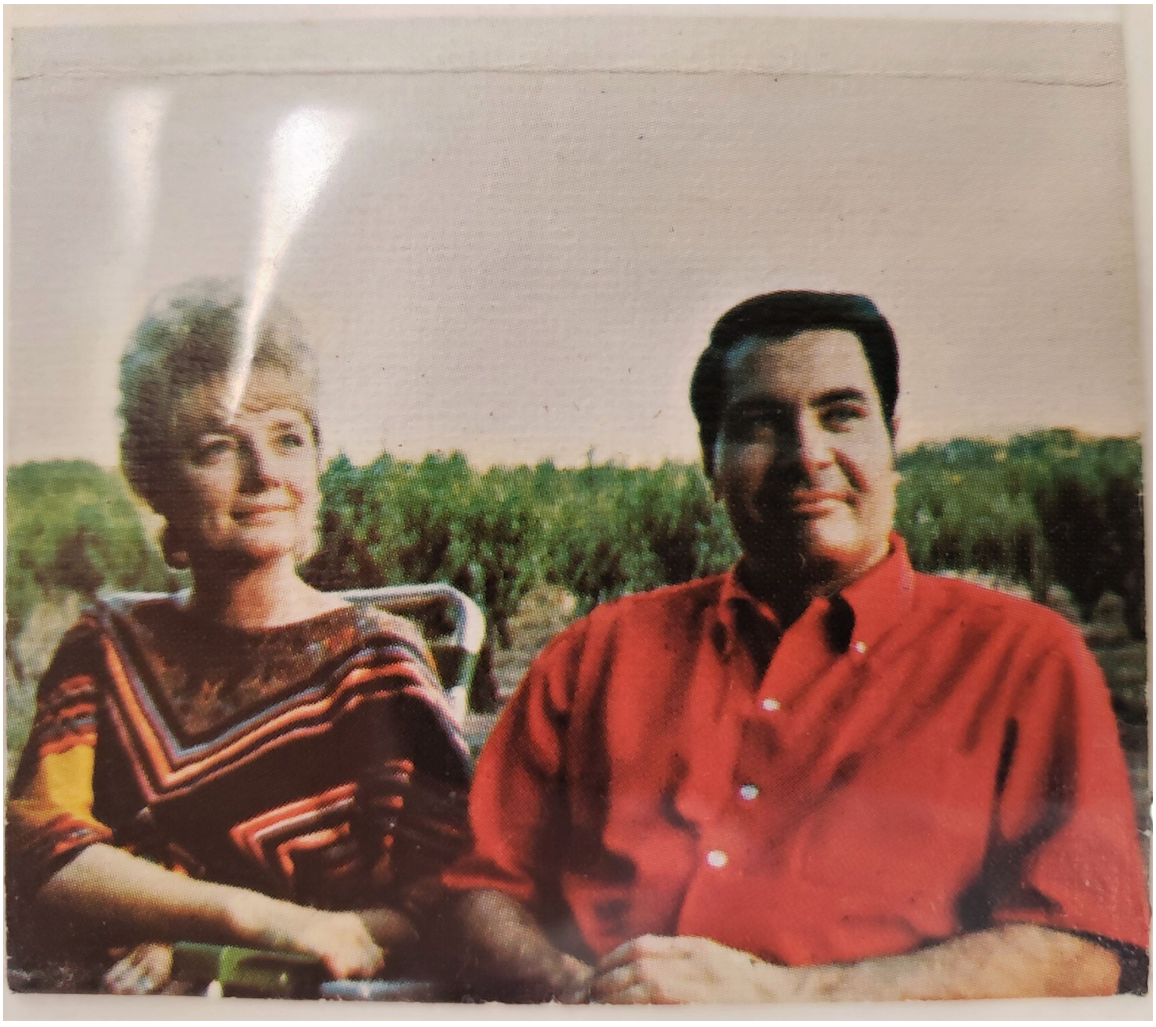
On November 18, 1978, nearly all 900 members of the Peoples Temple in Guyana, a "church" founded by Jim Jones (an un-ordained pastor), died in an apparent mass suicide. I remember well the news coverage from that time. So, on the occasion that I discovered the Jones Family Memorabilia Collection, in the archives of San Diego State University, I was delighted and eager to explore its contents.

The collection is deeply fascinating, consisting of numerous photos from the Peoples Temple in San Francisco, as well as images from their famed and tragic Guyana phase. Here, I entertain reflections on three images, which exemplify the life and times of Jim Jones, self-proclaimed preacher and cult leader of infamy.

Among historians and investigators, it's widely agreed that Jones started his first Peoples Temple endeavor in Indiana during the 1950s, eventually relocating to Redwood City in Mendocino County, California, and establishing the organization's largest membership in San Francisco during the 1970s. The visual impact of this movement, with its tragedy and confusion, comes from the staggering number of photos taken at the San Francisco church and, later, in Guyana at the Peoples Temple agricultural commune.

From the archival collection, I recall seeing numerous pictures of family events and church scenes, enraptured congregants listening to their leader, the Jones children smiling on Christmas morning or sitting dutifully near their father's pulpit. Also in the archives, we find a report card documenting Jones's unremarkable college career. As for the photo record, it tells of a cult leader who ascended almost without interruption, manipulation being his true talent rather than academics. Yet, we are faced with a mystery. Aside from boundless charisma and arrogance, what enabled Jones to persuade hundreds of people to surrender their lives, and the lives of their children, to him?

Posed with his wife, Marceline, he looks every bit the bland suburbanite. Yet, there is quite a bit more to the story, as we shall see.



The Media Persona

Although he attended Indiana University Bloomington, and eventually completed a bachelor's degree at Butler University, I have found no record of any religious training for Jones, apart from his entrance into the Methodist Church and involvement with various Christian organizations. Did he simply awake one morning, don preacher's attire, and emerge fully formed as a renegade reverend?

Here, we find the second image, more closely resembling his media persona, the modified pompadour and disturbing gaze, just visible through his sunglasses. It's likely that this photo is the most famous in the collection, giving us an idea of life at the Peoples Temple, the "Rainbow Congregation" that took San Francisco by storm.

Jim Jones: Grand Jury Foreman (and Chair of the Housing Authority)

Interestingly, the media rarely mentioned that Jones was more than a theatrical preacher and sexual predator--yes, that as well. During the late 1960s and early 70s, he served as the grand jury foreman for Mendocino County and also chaired San Francisco's housing authority. My source is an article in the September 30, 2000 edition of *The Berkley Daily Planet*, wherein Michelle Locke of the Associated Press states the following:

Over the next year, Stoen got to know Jones, who was on the board of directors of the legal aid office, one of his many official posts. Jones also was foreman of the Mendocino County grand jury and would later be appointed chair of San Francisco's housing authority.

Locke's article is entitled, "Jonestown Lawyer Comes Back to Face His Demons in Mendocino County, this Time as a Prosecutor" and tells the story of Timothy Stoen, an attorney for the Peoples Temple who later became a county prosecutor in Mendocino, California–a strange career trajectory, to be sure.

At any rate, we find that the crazy preacher, famed for suiciding his entire cult in the jungles of Guyana, was actually part of the government establishment with considerable authority and access. Isn't that interesting? Jones was also known to have associated with First Lady Rosalynn Carter, the same first lady who was acquainted with John Wayne Gacy, the children's birthday clown convicted of torturing and murdering over 30 young men. Add to that the gunfire that killed Congressman Leo Ryan on the tarmac near Jonestown–-just prior to the massacre--and the whole situation becomes, well, a tad questionable. Oh, and don't forget that Jones and his wife were able to adopt eight children with no questions asked by the court, apparently.

The media rarely, if ever, connected the many dots of his questionable activities. Had the evening news ever mentioned that Jones was a court official and government appointee, with ties to the White House--and a great fondness for other people's children--the public might have had a better view of the truth.

Founding Jonestown: An Agricultural Experiment in Guyana

Being a cult leader certainly comes with challenges, not the least of which is bad publicity. In 1977, *New West Magazine* reported that the Peoples Temple had nearly 20,000 members, adherents who referred to Jones as "Father" and willingly surrendered their assets to him. The problem was the prominence of certain followers, some of whom hailed from wealthy families with powerful law firms at their disposal. As for the poorer members (many elderly African Americans) who handed Jones their meager belongings, their plight cast a dark shadow over his utopia. So, with his legendary paranoia fully inflamed, Jones gathered up the church and departed that same year. This is where the question of logistics comes to mind, a subject largely ignored by the media.

Jones apparently had no trouble bringing some 900 people into a foreign country to take up residence, establishing an agricultural experiment on land whose ownership remains unclear, Guyana having transferred from British rule to independence in 1966. Perhaps the good reverend simply used his government connections--and conveniently died along with his cult followers/prisoners on November 18, 1978. Something tells me there's more to the story, important details hidden in the jungle that now engulfs "Jonestown." True, it was an experiment of dramatic proportions, a grand and sadistic study in human behavior. But who, exactly, was the experimenter and who were the subjects?

Of the photos I did not include, there is a bit to say. Jones apparently had a penchant for owning disabled dogs, the picture of a German shepherd in a wheelchair coming to mind. All things considered, this really makes me cringe and wonder, but I digress. Although he was said to have tortured and killed animals as a child, that portion of research remains to be explored and fully analyzed.

The collection of photos, housed at the San Diego State University Archives, is rich and sheds light on a remarkable tragedy. Was it a government-sponsored experiment in social engineering, a *prisoner dilemma game*, or simply a lunatic preacher's dystopia? We may never know the entirety of things. Suffice it to say, however, that the circular relationship among court officials, politicians, a lunatic preacher, a convicted mass murderer, and a first lady of the United States is more than a little troubling.

In the last photo, we see Reverend Jim looking a bit more low-key, prior to donning his leisure suits and belting out those famous sermonic tirades, the power of which led hundreds to a horrifying end. Interestingly, in this final image, we see him reaching for those sunglasses. Jones lived from 1931 to 1978.

For Further Reading:

As I mentioned earlier, most media sources paint a woefully incomplete picture of Jones, ignoring the fact that he worked very closely with politicians and the court system, often interacting as a peer rather than an outsider seeking favors. This is a crucial issue. In the area of academic research, we find scholars working to explain the social and philosophical dimensions of his life, and the impact of the Peoples Temple, often in such abstraction as to obscure the overarching point; there is indeed far more to the story than meets the eye.

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Jones Family Memorabilia Collection:

San Diego State Special Collections & University Archives

Identifier MS-0516

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Depression

A View from Previous Decades

Once referred to as melancholy--an affliction of the humors--depression, dreadful and mysterious, has visited humanity for centuries. The other day, I came across a book from my library and gave the matter some thought.

Published in 1977, *Meaning & Void: Inner Experience and the Incentives in People's Lives* by Eric Klinger is a fascinating piece of intellectual history, a glimpse at forgotten notions, many of which may seem unreasonable today. To be fair, I clarify that my present reflection is essentially rhetorical and not intended to examine Klinger's work in depth. Rather, at the moment, I want to regard his ideas on depression in isolation, appreciating their historical contexts, as best I can. He states:

Most depressions, even a majority of those severe enough to receive clinical attention, gradually clear up without specific treatment. In fact, except for antidepressant drugs and electroconvulsive shock, there are no reliable treatments. For most depressions, therefore, there is a phase during which the depressed person is gradually returning to normal. This period is what I am calling a "recovery" phase **(p. 166).**

Here, we must regard the wider framework of this passage; it pertains to a clinician's understanding of how we, in our human complexity, set and achieve goals, making use of various incentives along the way. With this in mind, Klinger regards depression as an aspect of ongoing processes, an influencer of life rather than a compelling and insurmountable condition, which is what the malady has become in our time. According to his conclusions--and, presumably, a convincing body of evidence--recovery appears to be the rule rather than the exception.

A Nation in Search of Healing

For historical context, we recall that the war in Vietnam ended in 1975, the Mỹ Lai massacre of 1968 still uppermost in the nation's memory. Understandably, Americans hoped to put the tumult of war and campus rebellion in the past, moving forward with a renewed sense of selfhood. I see Klinger's concept of the "recovery" phase as a part of this mindset. Situated within a difficult period of history, this belief in automatic healing (the mechanisms of which remain unclear) prompts us to leave yesterday's sorrow in the past.

And today?

Solutions remain elusive, and optimism has subsided. In the shadow of Vietnam, depression might have been viewed as a process of human struggle and growth, something for which recovery would automatically arise. However, in the 2020s, it has become something else, a far darker experience with few defined phases of healing. In the face of multifarious theories and treatments, the problem seems to be growing and feeling more permanent.

For a variety of reasons, including (but not limited to) the breakdown of society on various levels, as well as our dependence on electronic media, many cases of depression seem to linger, entering periods of lesser influence often to rise again without warning. After centuries of analysis, and a vast array of treatments, depression remains a mystery. In the absence of spontaneous recovery, which eventually proved to be more the exception than the rule, what remains?

The Era of Meds

Now, we consider the rising prevalence of prescription drug use (and abuse), a crisis perhaps unforeseen in 1977. In three decades, however, the multi-billion-dollar industry has become more of a cash cow than an instrument of healing. And yet, we can be thankful that electroshock "treatment" is relegated to the past, placed in the dust bin alongside instruments of quackery and torture. At any rate, why consider a passage from an old psychology text?

I simply wonder if, in our search for depression treatments, Klinger's older ideas might be of enduring value. I'll reverse my previous skepticism and say, why not look back? Perhaps reducing the condition to a mere facet of experience, rather than allowing it to tower as an all-consuming entity, might serve patients well. Of course, doing so would greatly reduce the profits and influence of the pharmaceutical establishment. Indeed, it's doubtful that such a change will ever occur. I consider all of these things as I re-examine this text with, admittedly, far more to study and assess.

The Terrible Beauty of Cicadas

Defiant percussionists assaulting the air, cicadas are a novelty to me, as I don't recall having encountered them as a child. Happily, however, I have recently discovered their seasonal choruses. While enjoying the summer in Payson, Arizona, I noticed them one evening, as the atmosphere suddenly transformed into an auditory stage, a performance venue for things above, thousands of insects I could not see--and did not wish to behold in their multitudes. Really, apart from the overbearing beauty of their song, the presence of cicadas feels a bit pestilential, as it blankets the late afternoon.

From science we learn:

Every year some of the several thousand species of cicada emerge from underground, and the males begin to sing their raucous, almost deafening, song. Among these virtuosos of the insect realm, the males of one species of Australian cicada (Cyclochila australasiae) are distinguished for having the loudest insect call measured so far. **(1)**

Yes, they are indeed quite loud and intriguing, as well.

Walking in the evening, beneath towering cottonwoods, one hears the variety of tones they emit, like the auditory equivalent of a rough-textured surface, always the same yet different. It's quite amazing. Apparently, I'm not the only one to appreciate the ethereal symphonies of these insects. As indicators of the changing seasons, cicadas have long been known to Chinese and European writers, alike.

(. . .) we find it recognized very early that the different species of cicadas have different periods of emergence. For instance, in the Li Chi the tchen was taken as herald of midsummer and the han-tchen of late autumn. (2)

Moreover, the Cicada has come to represent resurrection in Chinese culture, the shedding of its skin providing a symbol of immortality through rebirth. But there is even more to appreciate about these insects, as their influence reaches deeply into the arts. Plato used their song as a backdrop to the conversation in Phaedrus, encouraging his audience to investigate beyond the surface meaning of words; he wants us to delve further, to fathom the sounds and movements of nature that contextualize the dialogue. (3)

I consider this each day, as the sound descends from canopies of lush trees, pulsating through the humid air. Each interlude begins in the same haunting manner; suddenly, the silence evaporates into an eruption of maracas, a frenzied movement that far exceeds what a human hand could produce. For some reason, I picture thousands of percussion instruments shaking simultaneously as the creatures begin their song. And were it not for the overbearing volume of their music, cicadas would provide a rich backdrop to human life, our conversations unfolding below them. With great curiosity, I continued to gaze each evening at the cottonwoods and wonder about these insects, so musical and outspoken. Then, I saw one.

Horror.

As I have mentioned before, I spent most of my life in Southern California, where robust insects are fairly uncommon. So, I was unprepared for the day I happened upon a burly cicada, with his latticed wings and eyes of complex beauty. It was a revelation; there he was, lifeless on the ground but still quite alarming to this ex-Californian. And here we find a paradox of nature, the terrible beauty of things that fly and creep into the house, insect songs that delight and, at the same time, hint at impending pestilence.

As I walk the dogs in the soft humidity of evening, I still scan the ground for deceased cicadas, and hope to avoid seeing them in flight. As delightful as their summer choruses are, insects are best heard and not seen, in my estimation.

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The Sound of Grace

Erik Satie and Gymnopédie No. 1

Perhaps you feel as I do about Gymnopédie No. 1, regarding it as a melody of the mind possessed of a certain sadness, yet radiant and peaceful, as well. In any event, please digress momentarily to enjoy it.

Yes, if you are American, and remember it as the background music for a cough lozenge commercial, you are correct, and tragically so. The melody was commandeered by advertisers on many occasions, becoming a theme of commerce for years. Happily, however, the piece experienced this without losing its aural impact. As for its timeless quality, Gymnopédie No. 1 exemplifies the way in which simple tunes prevail, evoking the most complex and haunting emotions the heart can attain.

Rising melodically from two chords, the piece concludes by shifting to minor, as if to resolve the listener's certainty with a slight nudge. As a composer, Satie understood that discord is sometimes the resolution favored by life. In the two Gymnopédie compositions that followed, the simple melodic structure continued, suggesting that multiple iterations are, at times, necessary to explore an idea.

And the simplest things often encompass the greatest variety of forms.

Erik Satie was an eccentric, if ever one existed, a product of late nineteenth century Romanticism who read daily at the French National Library and was known, in later life, for wearing the garb of bankers, this, while living in near poverty as an inventor of sounds. Perhaps his orderly appearance was a reflection of his deeper self, the visionary who governed his activities with care, each movement of the day unfolding like a devotion.

In every way, Satie was precise and beautifully attuned to regulating practices. He kept a strict routine, even scheduling the time of day at which he would be inspired to create, and, intriguingly, included the physical measurement of sound--the movements of various compositions and the noises around him--in his intellectual endeavors. All such eccentricities render him memorable.

Born in France in 1866, Erik-Alfred-Leslie Satie is considered one of the most unusual composers of the time, being a student of esoteric practices as well as a musician.

Near the end of his life, Satie studied sixteenth century counterpoint and concluded his career by writing what he called "furniture music." In this endeavor, he composed with interior decoration in mind. The idea had to do with the ubiquity of music and its ability to blend, to coexist with furniture as an element of the human environment. More than this, however, Satie is simply a creator of atmosphere, in my estimation, a shaper of less discernable things, like the *feeling* of two chords drifting through a sunlit library or circling the kitchen window with an invitation to venture outside. For me, Gymnopédie No. 1 brings these elements to mind, with beautiful urgency, and refreshes my own daily routine in the process. A prophet of Romanticism, Satie's work heralded the mechanized destruction of the twentieth century, granting us a pure melody by which to embrace the age. He died in 1925 at the age of 59.

Notes on the Translation of *Gymnopédie*

During my research, I found a consensus that the word *gymnopédie* translates into *gymnastics* or *nakedness*, in the sense of presenting raw contortions of expression, elements unclothed before the spectator. Satie and other French intellectuals of the nineteenth century generally regarded the term as a useful neologism.

For Further Reading:

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Gillmore, Alan M. *Erik Satie* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988).

Myers, Rollo H. *Erik Satie* (New York: Dover Publications, 1968).

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Archival Collections:

The papers of Erik Satie, including composition fragments, correspondence, essays, and drawings, are housed at the Houghton Library of Harvard University (Identifier: MS Mus 193). As of this writing, the collection is open for research, although the originals "are restricted from use."

April Snow in Utah

First, there were the many banners, undulating from windows high above as black sedans, the proud vehicles of state, drove slowly for all to behold and regard with wonder. Then, girls with flowers in their hair skipped unhurried, as sidewalk cafés brimmed in the afternoon with patrons–and always the uniforms hinting at darker things. There, in prosaic scenes, was the elegance of a nightmare.

After the dogs and I arrived in Flagstaff, Arizona for a stopover, I set up the RV in a refreshing bit of chill, cooked a burger for dinner, and watched a documentary about the Second World War, perhaps feeling a bit tired of recent news and the gathering clouds of apocalypse–-another war, as the horrors of the twentieth century remain unhealed. The film was composed of color footage, the Nazis reveling at their height of power, images all the more poignant for their relevance to our time.

My father fought in World War II, serving in Patton's Third Army, the Colored Division, storming Utah Beach on D-Day, seeing the horrors of a concentration camp, and surviving the Ardennes Forest during the Battle of the Bulge. As I recall, he also did occupation duty in Austria, for a time, and became rather fond of skiing. He spoke highly of the people he met and found it charming that European children would regard him with wonder, believing that he was made of chocolate. Beyond that, my father rarely spoke of the war.

After dinner, I took the dogs for a walk in the surrounding Coconino Forest and studied the mountains, those beautiful slopes filled with spring snow, and the air chilled to a pleasant perfection. Many years ago, my father trudged through winter hours and days as a young soldier, under vastly different circumstances, and emerged from the forest to return home. I consider this as the evening approaches, and I reflect on the journey of the next day. Although he has been dead for many years, and we were never fond of each other, I find myself remembering him in the shadow of these mountains.

Blanding, Utah

The drive was a bit longer and more tiring than I had anticipated, as miles of Arizona desert evaporated, like a traveler's dream, subsiding into the well-maintained highways of Utah. And in the distance, I saw even more majestic scenes of April snow, intensified by the sun, their shapes introduced by red rock plateaus. The expanse was almost overwhelming, as I rounded a series of curves, and the image of Utah's glory appeared in greater measure.

Long stretches of highway bring contrasting levels of awareness.

Just as mountain grandeur captured my thoughts, and I felt awed by the experience, I glanced at the gas gauge with a bit of concern. Then, I thankfully recalled stopping in the previous town, observing my ritual of taking the dogs out for their business and finding fuel. However, even with a full tank, a certain primal fear takes hold as one enters an unrelenting environment. And this stretch of highway was a bit challenging.

For many miles, the shoulder of the road would have been too narrow for my RV, had we needed to stop. Moreover, the winds were beginning to strengthen, as large trucks thundered by, pushing my vehicle closer to the edge of the road than I would have preferred. But with a bit of determination, we carried on into the afternoon.

Still with plenty of gas, we approached Blanding shortly after lunchtime, the Blue Mountain Trading Post and RV Park, to be exact, a curious showcase of native art that also serves as a waystation for travelers. As a place to sleep for the night, and dump the tanks before heading north, it was perfect. Interestingly, the owner inquired about my surname, explaining that the Palmers of the area were prominent and influential. I assured him that I was no relation.

Eventually, we arrived at our next destination, another small town, a bit closer to Provo and the vastness of the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. That will be an excursion for another day. Our current stop in Southern Utah brings historic towns (rumored to be haunted) and glorious state parks into our experience, a true adventure. As for my father, my recollections continue.

After my own experiences on patrol in law enforcement--but never in battle--I can look back on my father with a degree of understanding, although our experiences were markedly different. However, there were areas of overlap, as well. Wherever we serve, we perform the tasks that fall to us, dreadful as they may be, and put the pieces of our lives back together, as best we can. And, from time to time, we encounter the healing mercies of April snow.

Elegance in the Rough

Thoughts on Revisiting Nature

Throughout various ages, and for innumerable reasons, people have returned to nature, the landscapes and fauna that endure our influence and thrive in our shadow. Everyone who ventures into this realm has reasons for the journey, perhaps a private longing for freedom or healing. Indeed, for each one of us, something personal yet universal awaits our discovery as we proceed. Are you ready? Let's continue.

A jaunt through the pine trees of spring is refreshing, liberating the mind from routine thoughts. Something glorious unfolds before you, far away from the call of mundane experiences. Then, the moment passes and the obligations of life return. You've been refreshed, now get back into the SUV you just purchased and return to the rigors of life--check your phone as soon as service resumes.

This time of revisiting can, however, become permanent if one chooses to relocate and live rustically. Increasingly, more and more people do this, routinely exploring meadows where a bear might interrupt the hour, or a mountain lion could remain hidden, stalking, waiting for a chance to snatch the family dog--or even a small child. I admire the courage of those who make the wilderness their permanent home.

And then, there are the deadly extremes of weather that often claim the unprepared. The list of perils is long. As I think of it, perhaps cautiously revisiting nature in the spring is my preference. Elegance in the rough can be an occasional pleasure, a bit of refreshment for those of us who love urban life. And yet, even a brief walk into nature can invite drama.

Robert Walser, Swiss novelist and "missing link between Heinrich von Kleist and Franz Kafka" comes to mind.

Remembered for his glorious prose, and fantastical journeys of the mind, Walser lived modestly and endured much, often refreshing himself with walks in nature. And on Christmas day in 1956, his body was discovered in the snow. He was 78.

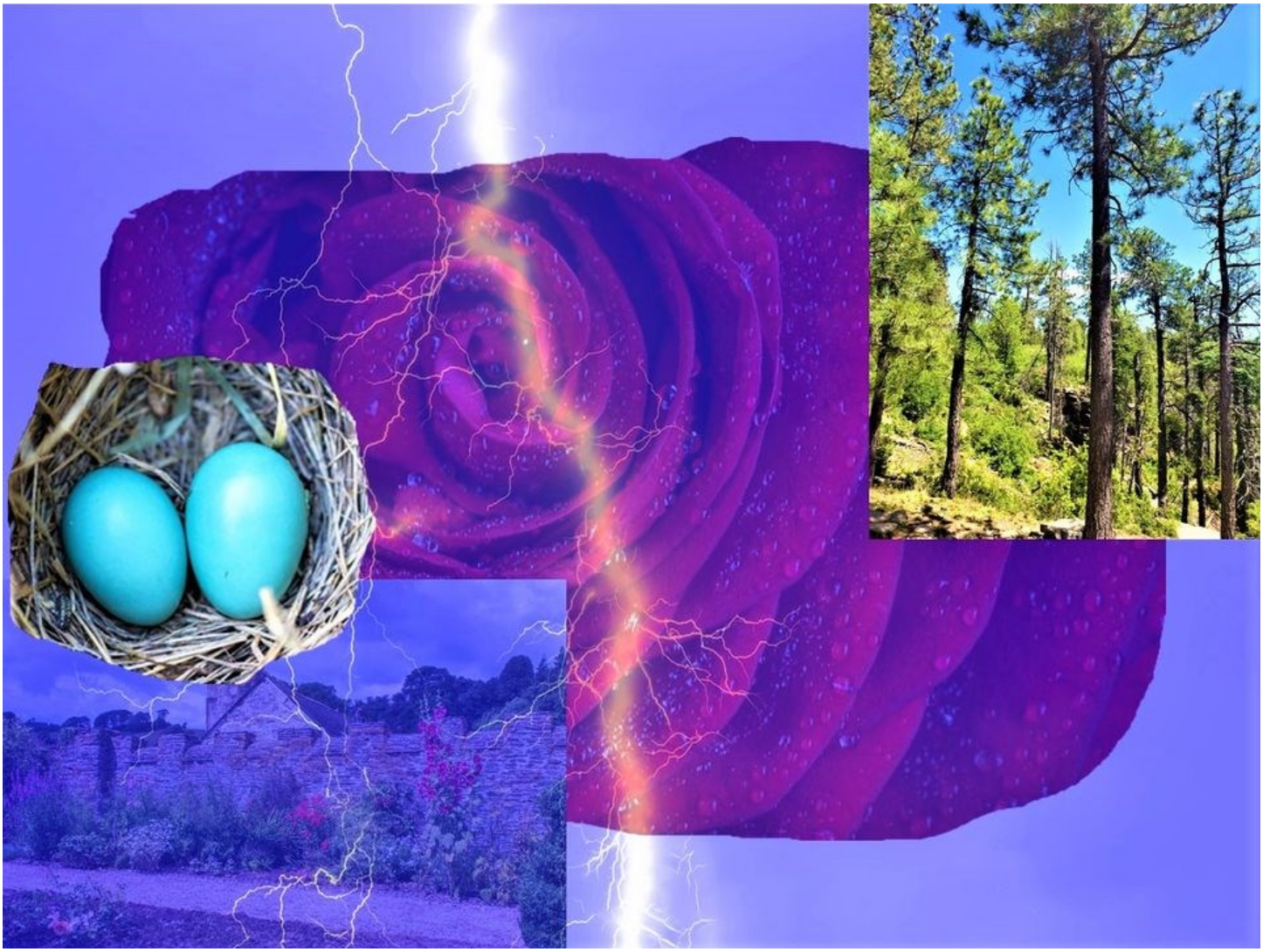
When I first read Walser's biography, and learned about his passing, I was struck by the powerful images; the lonely figure expiring on a park bench in winter; the hat that fell from his head upon his collapse; the question of whether or not he was missed when he failed to return. Revisiting nature, and enjoying rustic elegance, reminds me of these images. There is indeed a sad beauty to consider.

What do we hope to find within nature? Are we prepared to expire within its expanses, perhaps falling prey to painful snows or unrelenting predators?

My own walk is coming to an end, and I press a bit deeper into the surrounding hills.

The pine trees and rustic homes of Sedona inspired me to enjoy this walk, to ponder, and plan for the future. More than anything, however, this elegance in the rough, this compelling landscape, reminds me of the artists who walk--and sometimes pass away quietly--in winter.

I press on a bit longer into the desert of early spring, feeling quite blessed, indeed.



Flagstaff Rain,

English Gardens, and the Fragrance of Ecology

Thunderheads rolled in this morning, taunting the seekers of rain with their gray coolness. It's monsoon season, but most locals are skeptical about the arrival of storms, some believing the year will be a mild one. Regardless, dark clouds gathered, as if on cue, and sprinkled their way through the afternoon. For me, however, the amount of rain, whether torrential or modest, is of no consequence; it's the fragrance that delights me, an experience of nature I will remember for the rest of my life.

Shortly after my first Flagstaff, Arizona thunderstorm, the one that arrived midway through my stay, I stepped out of the RV, inhaled, and discovered the most compelling fragrance I've yet encountered, light with hints of aromatic pipe tobacco, subtle, yet sufficiently green to honor the surrounding forest. If epiphanies have an aroma, this is certainly it. Being new to the area, I believed my impressions to be unique, perhaps seeming quaint to the locals. After all, residents have myriad rainy seasons in their history, and must surely be jaded by the annual monsoons.

However, I was pleasantly surprised one day while eating in a local diner. Greeted by a waitress who raved about the fragrance of Flagstaff rain, I smiled in agreement, along with a few others. Whether newcomer or local, we were all of the same mind, appreciative of the storm and unjaded by summer's monotony. Soon, however, the moment faded away.

As with all fleeting beauty, the end arrives too quickly. As sunlight quells remaining moisture, and summer heat re-emerges after a period of exile, the fragrance subsides.

It's all the stuff of epic poetry and ballads from the previous century. But I digress. I soon find myself pondering different forms of the environment, as well, beyond forests and thunderstorms, all the way to the gates of a distant empire.

English Garden Metaphors

Literature suffers no lack of garden metaphors, many of which are elegant and telling. At the moment, I'm very interested in the subject, a high wall of contrast dividing forest rains from the sedate gardens of Europe. In particular, English cultivation of roses and neat hedgerows makes me curious about their ancient culture. Indeed, "More than one writer has looked for insight into Britain behind its garden walls" (1).

It's fascinating that the complicated (and often tragic) expanse of British history has been compared to gardening, such a basic human activity, nourishing to body as well as soul. Writer Jenny Uglow likened British gardening to a cone balanced on the small end, widening gradually over centuries--like their society--filling with all manner of plants and flowers in symbolic unison with the realm (2). I like this imagery, comparing the flowering of an empire with the work of its gardeners-- discretely glossing over the less wholesome aspects of human history and activity. And yet, there is still a sweet level of sincerity to this concept.

So, we have moved from the unique perfume of Flagstaff rain to the symbolic use of English gardens, connecting wild spaces in America to delicate plants and flowers growing far away. Next, we consider a different kind of fragrance, the redolent quality of ecology.

Indigenous Cultivation of the Land

Rarely, if ever, have indigenous farmers in North America been compared to gardeners in England, although both do much the same with their land and animal species. Here, we consider ecology.

While visiting the campus of Northern Arizona University, I picked up *Making Nature Whole: A History of Ecological Restoration* by William R. Jordan III and George M. Lubick. Although fragrant mountains cause one to wax poetic--on and on into the Arizona evening--thoughts can easily turn to conservation, as well, our dying ecosystems demanding care on so many levels. As I am staying near ancestral Hopi land, a couple of passages caught my attention right away. Regarding conservation the authors state:

Indigenous peoples do not have a concern necessarily with the preservation of all the species in their environment (and neither do most non-indigenous peoples).

In our terms, what this means is that the sustainable land management practices of traditional peoples may provide models for sustainability but are motivated not by concern for anything like "all parts" but by a desire to shape and maintain an ecosystem as habitat for themselves (3).

The authors go on to say that the "ancient institution of sacred groves" comes close to following our ideas of "ecocentric restoration." Interesting. Yes, all forms of cultivation prompt growers to pursue their own needs; gardeners and farmers abate weeds and rodents of all varieties, nurturing the plants and animals they favor, the species that support their flower baskets and dinner tables. Here, Michael Pollen's outstanding book, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education* comes to mind.

Concluding Thoughts

The monsoons and fragrances of the Coconino National Forest will remain with me, standing as reminders of our complicated and, quite often, contradictory interactions with the land. At times, we wander through tall pines, hoping to avoid predators, longing to feel refreshed and enjoy wild spaces. Then, we cross the threshold into domestic realms, where we cultivate gardens for pleasure and nourishment. And how do these various spaces stand in relation to one another? Regardless of culture or historical context, the urgent demands of ecological restoration define our encounters with nature, wildlands and gardens alike.

Works Cited:

(1) "Portrait: The English Garden" (*Wilson Quarterly,* Vol. 28, No. 3, Summer, 2004, p. 128).

(2) ibid.

(3) William R. Jordan III and George M. Lubick. *Making Nature Whole: A History of Ecological Restoration* (Washington: Island Press) 2011.

Texture and Seasons

The History and Art of Hopi Silver Overlay

Originally published in *First American Art Magazine* in the winter of 2024, this article provides an overview of the artform and profiles some of its most noteworthy practitioners. Please note that the original formatting has been preserved, so the layout will differ from that of the other pieces.

In keeping with the theme of this book, a number of collages were included. Those wishing to view specific works of art or artist portraits can reference the sources provided at the end.

The passion of Hopi silversmiths spans generations and, in compelling fashion, speaks to the influences of their homeland. The poignance of life in the American Southwest attends each piece, as artists create compositions with silver, local gemstones, and a wealth of ancestral customs. As caretakers of the environment, laboring to cultivate and rest according to the seasons, the Hopi have developed a rich aesthetic tradition, their jewelers rising to prominence worldwide. From the historical insights of Victor Masayesva, Jr., to the magnificent silver overlay of Roy Talahaftewa, Lucion Koinva, and Jason Takala, the Hopi aesthetic celebrates their ancient culture and suggests a promising future.

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To best understand the great significance of Hopi art, specifically, the work pertaining to silver overlay, one must approach the subject on a number of levels, aesthetic as well as historical. Here, we consider an overview, exploring Hopi culture and appreciating the intricate beauty of their craftsmanship. Above all else, we will discover that Hopi art reflects the texture and seasons of human experience. This holistic approach to daily life and artistic work yields compelling results.

The Hopi are matrilineal and organized by totemically-named clans, groups that occupy ancestral villages, bequeathing names and customs to their homelands. [1] As the westernmost Pueblo Indians, the Hopi dwell in Northeastern Arizona and speak the Northern Uto-Aztecan language. With a local population of roughly 9,000, they are far less numerous than the Navajo who also reside in the American Southwest. [2] Although their population is relatively small, the Hopi produce beautiful works of art, inspired by a reverence for nature and their observance of the seasons. Indeed, much of their culture is exemplified by silver overlay jewelry, upon which the narrative of Hopi heritage can be found. From sacred symbols to depictions of daily life, all things are interconnected and move in harmony.

Sacred Perfection and the Hopi Road of Life

As the jeweler's hand shapes new creations, so the progress of life unfolds according to the seasons.

The first three phases of creation are recognized with *Wuwuchim*, the first winter ceremony of the season, which is followed by the *Soyal* and *Powamu*. The emphasis of ceremonial life is clear; it fosters harmony with nature and offers thanks for the rain and corn upon which the people depend. Throughout the seasons, the Road of Life unfolds, and the clans follow it with the utmost care. Indeed, every ritual utterance and movement must be executed perfectly, lest the crops fail and the people face hardship. [3] Herein lies the cultural basis for creating meticulous jewelry, always with perfection and balance in mind. Going further, we discover more about seasonal observances and Hopi life, traditions that underwrite the creation of their art.

Micah Loma'omvaya Explains Hopi Winter Observances

"Everything we do throughout the year has some tie-in to making sure that the land is cared for." [4] As a manager of cultural resources, and an interpreter of his clan's traditions, Micah Loma'omvaya stresses that the Hopi people are cultivators of the land, above all else. As they prepare for the change of seasons, and perform rituals related to growth and rebirth, clan members create the themes of their art. In his address to the Arizona State Museum, Loma'omvaya presented the subject in great detail. With a series of images depicting Hopi clan traditions and migrations, he contextualizes a rich and complex cosmology. Specifically, Loma'omvaya explains the significance of *Kyaamuyaw*, or time of the *Sacred Moon*.

Moving into the winter solstice, an interval of reflection begins. During this time of rest, the land remains untilled and quiet, and people tarry close to home. Through this observance, called "reverence for the earth," preparations are made for the coming year. Also of importance, is the Hopi belief that the human and spiritual realms are in closest proximity during this period. And with that, the time of *Kyaamuyaw* is an occasion for storytelling and the sharing of clan traditions. Foods gathered during the spring and summer months are shared and rest prevails. Loma'omvaya stresses that the *Hopit Qatsi'nangwa* or, Hopi Way of Life, blends spirituality and ceremony with their cultivation of the land. The phrase "Life of Good Will" is often seen in association with *Qatsi'nangwa.* And the coming of winter allows time to appreciate these values. Interestingly, *Kyaamuyaw* also serves as the traditional time for weddings. Much silver jewelry depicts these occasions, marking the change of seasons and celebrating the rich textures of the Southwest. For a closer look at Hopi aesthetics and values, we consider the work of multi-media artist Victor Masayesva, Jr.

Victor Masayesva, Jr. and the Scope of Visual Representation

Because Hopi silver overlay is a visual expression of culture, as well as a flowering of imagination, we can learn much from briefly exploring film and still photography. Masayesva, known for his nuanced multi media depictions, was born in 1951 and raised in the Hopi village of Hotevilla, Arizona. Educated at Princeton, where he studied English, photography, and the history of Hopi ceremonies, Masayesva expands on traditional aesthetic forms to create a wider, somewhat modernist picture of indigenous life. Here, we consider his scope of visual representation:

Challenging the ethnographic imposition of cultural interpretation, Masayesva has written of "developing a new iconography originating from the mythical and visual songplay of our forefathers." He continues: "Recognizing the foundations of communications on the North American continent is the first step in participating in the development of a bold communications iconography by which we can become involved in a vibrant visual literacy . . ." [5]

Visual communication and iconography establish the context of Hopi silverwork. Moreover, such themes pose important questions to those who collect indigenous art for commercial as well as academic reasons. How can the sacred aspects of Hopi life, both the rituals and artistic creations, retain integrity in the face of buying and selling? This question, on myriad levels, is addressed by Masayesva in his work, as he explores the paradoxes of Hopi identity. In addition to still photography, he uses the medium of film to explore this subject.

In a scene from *Itam Hakim Hopiit*, a 1984 film, we are taken through the Southwestern landscape and its harsh textures, in the company of an old man who recounts his boyhood. The camera angle gradually reveals the storyteller's form, as he traverses a remote homestead and fills a bucket with water, all the while sharing memories of his father. The scene conveys not only the desiccation of desert life but also the dignity of human struggle, themes given great significance by Masayesva. In translation, the title means, *We/Someone, the Hopi*.

From the work of Loma'omvaya and Masayesva, we learn that the ritual spaces and traditions of Hopi life are complex, providing a wealth of subject matter to their jewelers. Like the man in Masayesva's film, these artists experience the beauty and sorrow of desert lands and, with their tools in-hand, translate them into silverwork.

A History of Hopi Silver Overlay

Prior to contact with Europeans, the Hopi crafted fine pottery for cooking, farmed with stone tools, and made jewelry from bone, wood, shells, and colored stones. What we know as traditional silver overlay only came to prominence during the twentieth century. In her book, *Hopi Silver: The History and Hallmarks of Hopi Silversmithing,* author Margaret Nicholson Wright chronicles the modern development of the art, which began to take shape during the late nineteenth century. During this time, a key figure emerged, transforming the craft with his skill and willingness to teach. [6]

At some point after 1890, the Zuni trader and silversmith Lanyade instructed Sikyatala (Yellow Light) of the Hopi Mustard Clan (an artist with Zuni ancestry) in the ways of silversmithing. It is likely that the latter learned soldering from his teacher and, over time, equipped his own workshop with a permanent forge, crucibles, ladles, and balances. From there, Sikyatala would go on to instruct his own students. [7] By 1906, men from all three Hopi mesas were creating silverwork with various decorative elements, some originating from traditional beliefs and practices, others reflecting the influence of Spanish leatherwork, but all possessing the unique character of the makers. Interestingly, along with the necessary skills of craftsmanship, time was also of importance. Jewelry produced for members of the Hopi community, rather than visitors, was generally of a more refined quality, since the artists were unhurried and could aim for perfection. However, when demand for tourist items increased, speed of production sometimes overshadowed quality and innovation. [8] And yet, regardless of commercial challenges, Hopi silversmiths developed extraordinary techniques for jewelry making.

Workmanship and Methods

The tools of Hopi silversmiths allow them to craft delicate designs while stamping and shaping pieces of metal with precision, no easy task. To execute the work, they use a variety of files, hammers and saws, the implements necessary to transform silver into art. Over the years, advancements in soldering materials, and the advent of acetylene torches, have made the work easier. In contrast, early silversmiths had to make use of blow pipes and flux for their soldering. As for the general technique of creating silver overlay, the process is fairly straightforward, but precision is essential.

Utilizing two layers of metal, the artist cuts a design on the top layer and then solders the two pieces together. This enables the maker to create the contrasting negative and positive spaces that characterize the artform. During the etching phase, when the design is drawn, the artist is careful to create clear lines with no overlap. From there, a jeweler’s saw is used to cut the outer lines of the drawing. After the cutting process, pieces are removed to reveal the shape of the design. Although the work can be painstaking, and requires precision, great freedom of expression is granted by delicate techniques. For example, the angles of the drawing can be softened or hardened by subtle movements of the thread saw. Then, with honed files, the inside surface of the design is polished, allowing light and shadow to further accent the work. Here, we note that the fit of the silver pieces is of key importance. When the second plate is slightly larger than the first, the soldering process is a bit easier. As the pieces are joined, flux is applied to the surface being welded, along with brazing material.

The methods of workmanship involve a number of steps, so each artist must master a variety of skills. However, it is the impact of storytelling, imbued with symbolic images, that breathes life into the metal. Now that we have an overview of silver overlay history, and a picture of the craftsmanship involved, a look at key artists is in order.

Roy Talahaftewa: Creating Narratives

Roy Talahaftewa has mastered silversmith techniques as well as storytelling. Born in the Hopi village of Shungopovi in 1955, he builds on the rich history of Hopi silverwork, developing new techniques to convey his narratives. As an artist, he combines tufa cast with traditional overlay methods to create unique pieces, one of which is an exquisite pendant. Depicting a Hopi woman, the piece features the shape of her maiden's hairstyle, while utilizing symbolic elements to describe her journey. Turquoise represents purity, while a combination of minerals symbolizes the energy of her experience, moving from childhood to adult life. Building on this theme, Talahaftewa placed a circular piece of turquoise in the center of ironwood, further emphasizing the purity of the maiden's heart. In addition, he included designs representing clouds, lightening, and prayers. Again, we find the theme of life seasons offering a focal point, as the artist depicts harmony between humans and the natural world. The rough texture of silver, created by the tufa technique, contrasts beautifully with Talahaftewa's divisions of space. Brightly-colored stones accent the ironwood without overshadowing it, as the maiden's hair style creates the overall theme. [9]

Lucion Koinva and Jason Takala: Man in the Maze

Born in Shungopavi in 1970, Lucion Koinva draws inspiration from the region's most ancient symbols. A member of the Sun Forehead Clan, Koinva created his "Man in the Maze" ring to depict a famous Southwestern petroglyph, a design known to most local tribes. [10] Considered a representation of life's journey, the motif fits beautifully into the tradition of Hopi silver overlay, conveying ancient symbols of humanity by modern means. However, Koinva is certainly not alone in his appreciation of maze imagery.

Artist Jason Takala, known for the precision of his cutting, and his mastery of double overlay, enjoys “making pottery” as a silversmith. His work, which includes the use of gold as well as silver, can be viewed at King Galleries in Scottsdale, Arizona. Takala has created his own interpretations of the Man in the Maze theme, often utilizing the abstract forms of pottery design. Moreover, his oeuvre encompasses a variety of elements, bears, eagle feathers, and phases of the moon, figuring prominently into his compositions. Whereas Koinva’s designs often contain a single, stylized element, Takala favors interlocking patterns, designs more common to textiles than silver. By following the work of artists like Talahaftewa, Koinva, and Takala, we gain a useful overview of styles and techniques.

In the highest expressions of the art, Hopi silverwork fuses prosaic and sacred themes into rich patterns, making use of metal as well as stones and minerals. In Arizona, artists find turquoise, peridot, geodes, petrified wood, and amethyst in relative abundance. So the embellishments of silverwork can be quite ornate. As for the subject matter of the art, transitions from youth to maturity, living in harmony with the land, and celebrating the seasons are prevalent themes. Now, we come to the question of how to curate Hopi silver overlay. What are some of the main considerations?

Curatorial Space: Galleries and Museums

As Hopi art moves through stages of appropriation, change, and repatriation, we face the problem of how to curate the work. In the gallery setting, custom pieces are presented in display cases for sale, with lighting and props used accordingly. Sometimes, historical elements are included to remind buyers of the work's authenticity. I asked a gallery owner in Arizona about creating displays for custom silver jewelry. Specifically, I wanted to understand how he cultivates authenticity, conveying the beauty and power of Hopi life to his customers. The answer was simple. In most cases, his wife experiments with display elements and photo shoots, following the lead of her intuition. Over the years, her approach has been very successful, representing a variety of indigenous artists and selling their work across the world. However, for the complexities of museum work, curators must focus on the details of history and culture much

The work of early Hopi silversmiths gradually developed into the ornate creations we see today. Pieces exhibited in galleries, and preserved in various museums, are the result of a long and challenging process. And, it is important to note that the work is communal as well as solitary, as we see at the Museum of Northern Arizona, where artists gather to study their craft and develop new forms of expression. Such collaborative efforts began decades ago. During the 1930s and 40s, MNA founder, Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton worked with curator Virgil Hubert for the advancement of Hopi silversmithing. Along with artists Paul Saufkie and Fred Kabotie, they established the Hopi Silvercraft Cooperative Guild with a group of World War II veterans. With Saufkie's skill in metalwork, and Kabotie's design acumen, the program was created to provide returning servicemen with a profession. As the students hammered silver bars into sheets, and applied their designs, the modern overlay technique was born. Although the guild no longer exists, the tradition of craftsmanship and academic research continues, attracting experts worldwide. Atsunori Ito, of the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan, continues to work with Hopi silversmiths to review and interpret the MNA's collection. [11]

The Heard Museum: Silver Boxes

It is important to note that jewelry is not the only form of silverwork that carries a wealth of Hopi designs. At the Heard Museum of Phoenix, Arizona, utilitarian pieces were given their time in the spotlight. Elegant Vessels: A Century of Southwest Silver Boxes was an exhibit that highlighted indigenous silverwork and included the art of Hopis Paul Saufkie and Morris Robinson. The exhibit included 75 boxes dating from 1914 through recent works from 2022. Visitors witnessed the development of technical and aesthetic methods in a powerful narrative, comprised of pieces from the John and Carol Krena Collection, among others. A blend of art and utilitarian practicality, the silver boxes offer an interesting contrast to the pendants, rings, and bracelets for which most Hopi silversmiths are known. [12]

The Future

There will likely remain a level of tension between the commercial aspects of the art and its analysis, and challenges related to the changing needs of the silversmiths and their protégés. As historian Paula Baxter noted back in 1994:

> The making and selling of Southwestern Native American jewellery is a thriving business through-out the United States of America, and in the past two decades it has begun to have an international impact on contemporary jewellery design. Over the last twenty years, there have been some stabs at formalist evaluation, mainly in the form of museum exhibition catalogue essays. Increasingly, shifts between anthropological and art historical explanations are the product of varied approaches adopted by scholarly investigators. [13]

With so many interests involved, the years following Baxter's observations have witnessed a flowering of creativity as well as the growth of business. However, in the final analysis, perhaps the core issues remain straightforward. Hopi silverwork is continually enriched by emerging artists, those who augment tradition by adding their own narratives. And, with each new creation, we find a story unfolding, perhaps regarding seasons of change and cultivation of the land, or the memories of an elder, carefully commemorated in silver. In any event, the texture and seasons of Hopi life, depicted by their silversmiths, continue to grace museum collections and galleries throughout the world.

Notes:

1. Wesley Bernardini. “Identity as History: Hopi Clans and the Curation of Oral Tradition” (*Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Winter, 2008), p. 486).

2. The 2010 United States Census reports that 18, 327 Americans self-identify as Hopi, with roughly half of that number living on the Hopi Reservation.

3. Phyllis Doyle Burns. “Ancient Hopi Rituals, Ceremonies, and Traditions” (*Owlcation,* September 26, 2022, Ancient Hopi Rituals, Ceremonies, and Traditions - Owlcation).

4. Micah Loma’omvaya. “Understanding Hopi Winter Traditions: Transitions in a Traditional Hopi Village” (Arizona State Museum Presentation, December 14, 2022).

5. Documentary Educational Resources Website: Filmmaker Bios: Victor Masayesva, Jr. Victor Masayesva, Jr. | DER Filmmaker Bio

6. Margaret Nicholson Wright. *Hopi Silver: The History and Hallmarks of Hopi Silversmithing* (University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2003) p. 6.

7. Wright, p. 9.

8. Wright, p. 6-8.

9. Mark Subletti. (Roy Talahaftewa Artist’s Biography) Medicine Man Gallery Website.

10. Heard Museum Shop Description, Phoenix, Arizona.

11. Museum of Northern Arizona Website Hopi Silver Jewelry | Museum of Northern Arizona (musnaz.org).

12. Museum of Northern Arizona Website (“Elegant Vessels: A Century of Southwest Silver Boxes”).

13. Paula Baxter. “Cross-Cultural Controversies in the Design History of Southwestern American Indian Jewelry” (*Journal of Design History,* Vol. 7, No. 4 (1994), p. 233).

Oregon Summer

A Study of Light and Rural Shadows

(Originally Published in issue 69 of* Adelaide Literary Magazine*)

A column of clouds approached a red figure in the sky, a form which, rather gradually, became the sunlight of dusk as it faded before a wildfire. Neither close nor far enough for comfort, flames burned the ridge of a nearby valley, the name of which I did not know, generating small tornadoes as my neighbor and I looked on in silence. What could we do but appreciate the spectacle? And the air remained oddly fragrant, rich with the smell of pine consumed by fire. We were facing two modest eruptions that evening, one to the west and the other slightly north of our location. Regarding the latter, its smoke assumed the shape of something alive and restless, resembling a plant growing wildly without human consent, rising to accompany the sun. Although remarkable at first, the billows soon gave way to another intervention of clouds, creating within the space of several minutes, a muting effect. It was summer in Oregon, in the far regions of the United States.

I look back on my travels here with wonder and not a little admiration for the ways of nature. There is, indeed, something indescribable about the Pacific Northwest, each day revealing some new level of splendor. As for the town of Silver Lake, Oregon, where I spent much of the summer, it bears special consideration.

In the presence of sagebrush, fallen wooden buildings, and cows meandering near the highway, the place feels peaceful but unsettling, as if something unnamed lurks and awaits the arrival of night. In Oregon, I encountered a time of silent darkness unlike anything I had previously known — the aura of a very rural town. Although once possessed of an ice cream parlor and thriving locals, the community of Silver Lake has, in recent years, decomposed into tragic remains. Still hopeful, however, residents inexplicably fly banners in support of Trump and chat amiably at the gas station, always pleasant to truckers and RV nomads who arrive for necessities. A member of the latter group, I enjoy the restfulness of this small town. Even with the persistent barking of dogs — creatures hidden by sagebrush and the darkness of night — sleep comes easily here, which is both comforting and a bit alarming, as if one might be lulled into complacency when alertness would be more advantageous. The atmosphere of decaying spaces is, in no small way, filled with dangers and delights. All of this called for my attention as I drove into the heart of things.

Swathes of high desert divide the panhandle of Idaho from Silver Lake, the contrasting textures of which are, at once, bleak and majestic with countless pines and sandy regions in their embrace. Interestingly, the rural contrasts invoke nostalgia for city life, as I drive farther into the landscape. From the distant past, I recall canyons of modernist skyscrapers, and the fetid air of trash day in Manhattan, noise and traffic surrounding me at every moment. Leaving Idaho, such memories feel delightful and persist, almost in defiance of the desolate highway before me. And, as always, a sense of illbeing influenced my journey, nothing clearly defined but present, nonetheless.

In Silver Lake, I cannot quite put my finger on anything I sense or attempt to discern from the visible world. The yards teeming with old farm equipment and trash; once useful wooden structures falling away, season after season; Rottweilers and pit bulls snarling behind chicken wire fences, as hogs bathe in late summer heat, all such things speak to decay but rarely arrive at their logical conclusion. Yards are never entirely engulfed by trash. In the same manner, wood decays while structures remain standing against all odds, and the dogs that burst from inadequate fences rarely attack passersby. Everything is, at once, intangible and overbearing. And in light of the paradoxical environment, stories abound.

A local rancher, a tall and weathered man who prospered as a rodeo cowboy, told me a great deal. According to him, the habitable structures are often occasional residences, occupied for hunting season and the days of harvest. As for the creepy ambience, most residents believe it has to do with the fire of 1894, a tragedy that claimed a substantial amount of the population in nearby Christmas Valley and remains at the heart of local lore.

After an attendee of the Christmas Eve festival toppled a lamp, and ignited a wooden floor, nearly all present for the occasion were trapped in flames, wedged behind an inward-opening door. For good reason, the presence of fire is never regarded lightly here, which I consider while planning the next portion of my journey. Thereafter, I continued to travel west for a time, heading for the coast.

Grants Pass, Oregon was livelier in comparison, with its coffee places, shopping, and bookstores, which I explored before reaching my destination, the town of Gold Beach. With refreshing summer fog, and beaches rich with black sand and rocks of the most delightful colors, the westernmost part of Oregon was worth the long drive. Then, in typical nomadic fashion, I discovered additional points of interest.

Guided by map notes from a local, I explored redwoods in Northern California — and photographed slugs in coastal forests — before returning to Silver Lake for the remainder of summer. Upon arrival I began to reflect, yet again, on the remarkable contrasts that divide rural life from days spent in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Seattle.

To cross the street in Manhattan, one must be persistent, moving between cars while avoiding fellow pedestrians — mainly in defiance of traffic signals. In the cities mentioned above, I enjoy architecture, bookstores, and navigating crowds as I search for cafés and markets, always seeking destinations favored by the locals. And, of course, there are the famous points of interest. The water tower in Chicago and the Flatiron Building in New York, as well as Fisherman's Warf in San Francisco and the Space Needle of Seattle, all come to mind as I reminisce. And what about the secrets they hold?

Unlike the creepier elements of rural life, something about urban strangeness feels a bit less forbidding. Perhaps it has to do with the intrusions of countless people and the illumination of neon lights, which, although unwholesome, entertain visitors with glamour and the excesses of wealth. In small towns, no such pleasure exists. All of these things came to mind one chilly night, as I enjoyed the comforts of my bed, and the dog whined to go outside.

For the record, venturing into the darkness of rural spaces is something I try to avoid. However, as nature sometimes calls for the dogs at 2am, my mini golden and I proceeded a few steps into the night. Immediately, she froze and stared into the black distance with alarm, this, as we listened to dreadful barking from unseen Rottweilers. The situation felt specific to the country. By contrast, in the city, one might fear the sudden appearance of a hooded figure with a knife, or the perils of heavy traffic. However, in rural Oregon, late at night, the strange sense of danger often remains unidentified, as it filters through the darkness and whispers unsettling things. With this in mind, I persuaded my little dog to finish her business quickly.

After sunrise, I discovered that the fire had moved west of our location, a fragrance of burning pine and the grayness of smoke still presiding. The intrigue of wildfire lights and rural dangers had concluded for me, signaling the end of summer.

Personae

Two Faces of the Essayist

I find that essayists have two distinct faces, the first pertaining to their role as observers and the second being a bit more controversial--the essayist as mediator of impressions. For the first example, I will reference the work of W. G. Sebald whose books blend the genres of memoir, fiction, travel writing, and personal reflection quite brilliantly. From there, we will examine a passage from Michel de Montaigne for a brief comparison and contrast.

On the Scope of the Genre: Nonfiction Writers as Recorders of History

Nonfiction writing is something of a misnomer, as it suggests the implausible, that events were recorded *exactly* as they took place, either long ago or in the not-so-distant past, the fragrances and nuances of conversation being recalled in detail, the surroundings remembered as they were. True, we could argue about the role of perception and memory, debating the accuracy of any retelling or recollection. However, instead of diving down that particular rabbit hole, we can examine a bit about the essence of nonfiction.

So, what are the intellectual origins of "creative nonfiction," and how do we contextualize its rich history? Here, we turn to the scholarship of Wendy Bishop and David Starkey:

In The Art of the Personal Essay, Phillip Lopate traces the genre's background from Seneca and Plutarch to Japanese and Chinese writers such as Kenko and Ou-Yang Hsiu through Michel de Montaigne—"the giant, the mountain of the form"—to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British writers like Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Charles Lamb, and William Hazlitt. Among his model essayists in the twentieth century are Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, Natalia Ginzburg, H. L. Mencken, James Thurber, James Baldwin, Joan Didion, Annie Dillard, Scott Russell Sanders, and Richard Rodriguez. According to Lopate, what this diverse collection of writers has in common is the ability to succeed in a genre that can be overwhelming for lesser writers because its boundaries appear so limitless: "The essay is a notoriously flexible and adaptable form." **(1)**

Regardless of their unique styles and perspectives, what all diligent nonfiction writers have in common is very clear: They observe the surrounding world and its substance, reflect on their impressions, and write the account as a record of history. From the list above, we find a variety of personalities, each one having made unique contributions to the craft. As skillful observers and mediators of language, the writers noted above can teach us a great deal.

The next time you read one of your favorite nonfiction writers, or begin one of your own projects, consider how the face of the *observer*, and that of the *mediator*, will influence the narrative as it unfolds.

In *The Rings of Saturn*, we have a protagonist who walks in the English way, roving the countryside in order to recover and find wholeness in his surroundings. The journey is one of observation, both inward and outward, which eventually leads the narrator to mediate his impressions, synthesizing them into a dreamlike montage of commentaries.

Once, when lightening again flashed across the sky, I looked down into the hotel garden far below me, and there, in the broad ditch that runs between the garden and the park, in the shelter of an overwhelming willow, I saw a solitary mallard, motionless on the garish green surface of the water. **(1)**

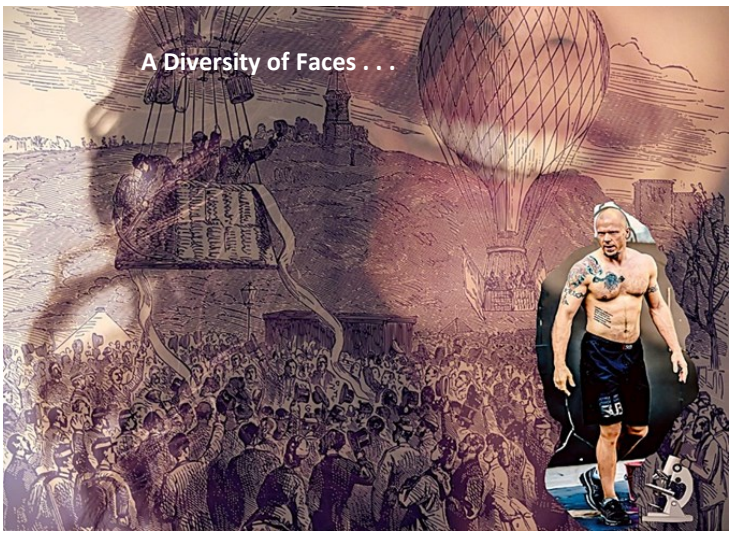
This passage offers a succinct example, one of many within the book, which exhibits the writer's face in the light of an extended observation. Sebald moves us from the vastness of an illuminated sky into the comparative smallness of a cultivated space. Once there, he plays the role of mediator, creating an image of contrasts where a wild animal dies in the transitional space of a ditch. The image he uses to convey this observation is that of a duck.

In Sebald's work, one can discover numerous examples of the narrator/essayist wearing two faces, that of observer, as well as that of *mediator of images*. I chose the passage above for its sheer impact and immediacy. Now, we digress in order to consider a theme from Montaigne, also related to animal life.

(. . .) yet there is a certain consideration, and a general duty of humanity, that binds us not only to the animals, which have life and feeling, but even to the trees and plants. We owe justice to men, and kindness and benevolence to all other creatures who may be susceptible of it. **(2)**

Here is another example of the essayist's dual roles at work, wherein Montaigne observes our relationship with the natural world. From there, he references our connection to nature insightfully, by introducing the mediating influence of ethics, that is, by addressing our responsibility to all living things.

Our exercise here has only scratched the surface of a complex theme. However, the two passages above show us, in clear fashion, how an essayist/narrator can move skillfully from the role of observer to that of mediator, blending two distinct disciplines in seamless fashion. With that in mind, we will conclude with a few reflections on the history and scope of the nonfiction genre.



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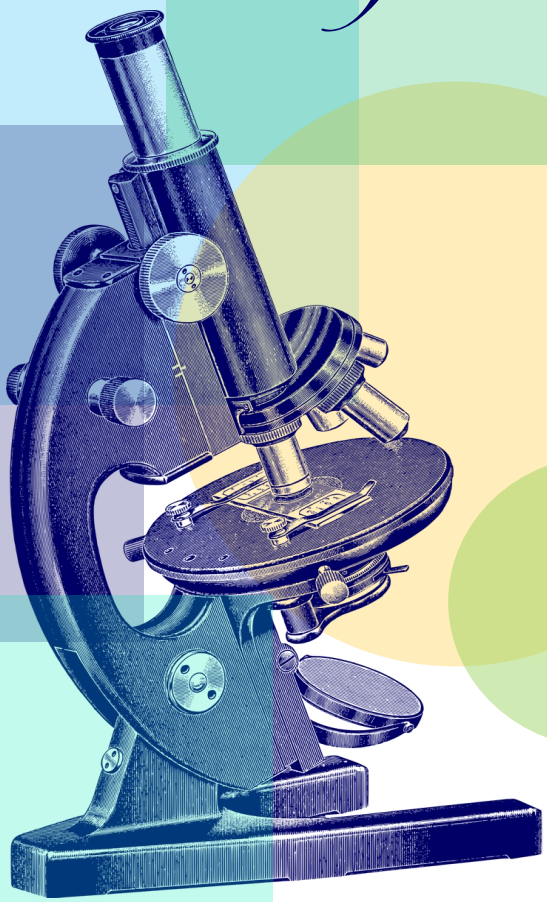
Theoretical Reflections



The Experimental Page

Charting the Course of Memory

In the previous section, we explored traditional forms of memoir, reviewing a collection of stories related to career and travel. Here, we continue with experimental constructions, specifically, prose musings, poetry, and artwork that express the dream images of memory. With this task in mind, I reflect on a lecture delivered by Fred Friedrich Ulfers at the European Graduate School, an insightful examination of novelist Robert Musil, which bears on our current theme.

Uploaded to YouTube on September 15, 2007, the video shows Ulfers speaking earnestly to the Media and Communications Department of the EGS, gesturing to the audience as he moves fluidly from English to German and back again. On this occasion, he theorized about a deeply philosophical reading of literature, " . . . arriving at an ethics that is no longer based on oppositional structures but on relatedness . . . with a certain ontology that spells a kind of relatedness of everything to everything." And, for Ulfers, a writer who exemplifies this model is Musil, a novelist who developed a form of *utopianism* and additionally created a method of assaying (or analyzing) literary themes for use in his stories. This notion of relatedness, and how it pertains to narrative structures, intrigued me quite a bit. So, I performed some of my own literary experiments to see what I might learn.

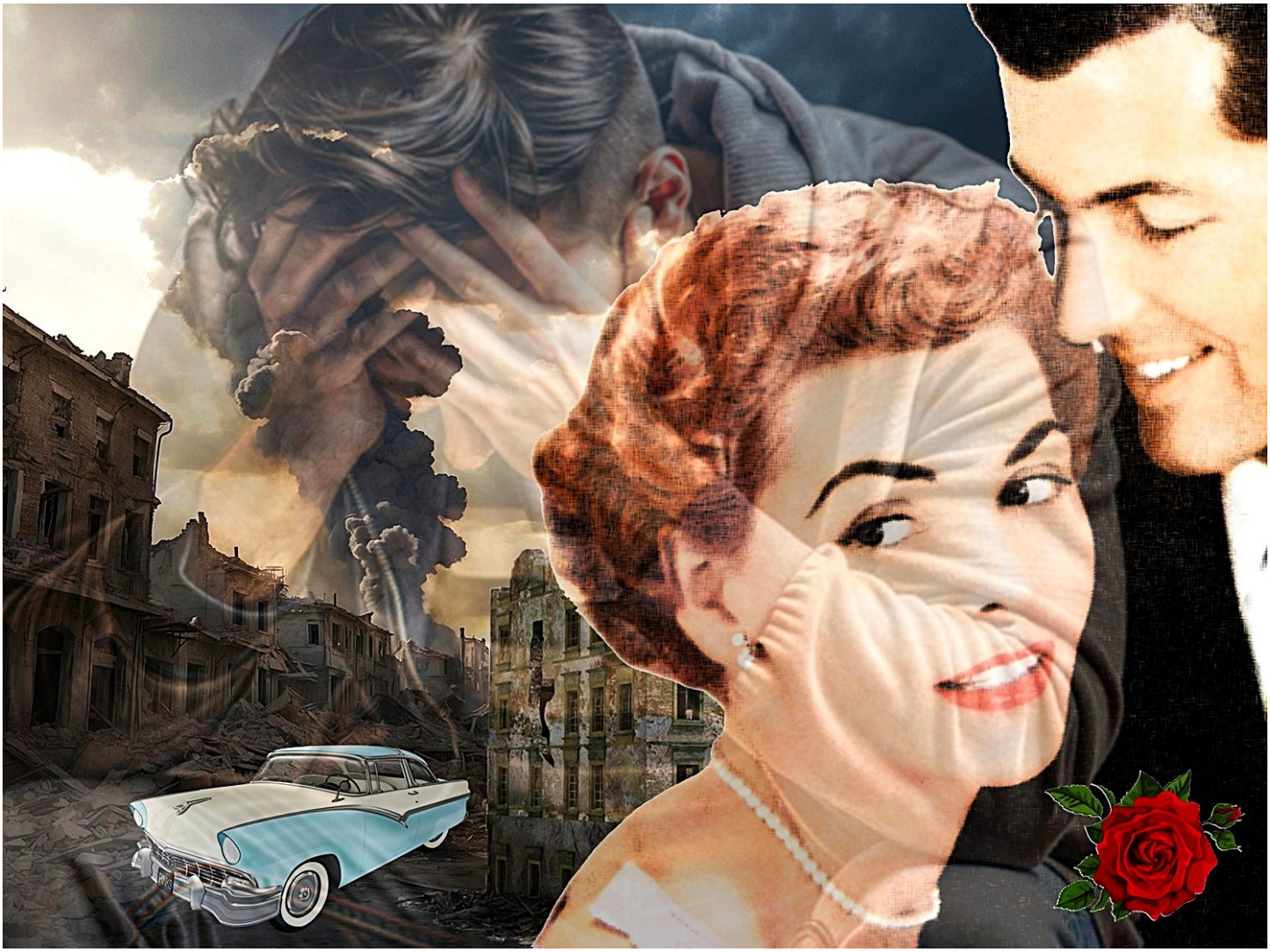
Here, I include the results, a selection of essays and poems designed to identify *relatedness* in narrative structures, albeit implicitly rather than explicitly. Through a set of discursive themes, I attempt to explore the ways in which disparate concepts can merge and interlock within the context of a story and, in so doing, create meaning from the elements of memory. However, unlike Ulfers, I am not dealing with the subject of ethics.

In my estimation, this conception of relatedness is an aesthetic exercise, a thought process that addresses matters of taste and creative expression, having nothing whatsoever to do with ethics, per se. I wish to make that clear. At any rate, I find the concept of relatedness to be useful, as it offers a point of departure for literary experimentation and inquiry. In the following pieces, we will build on this theme to explore ways of remembering and picturing the artifacts of human experience, and we will again make use of collage images to depict the visual elements of each theme.

Now, let us continue with our journey, using the experimental page to chart our course through the realm of ideas.

Onward, Into the Way of Remembering

Metaphorically, propaganda is the lens of a slanted viewpoint, crafted by the state, and placed secretly over the eyes of the unsuspecting. It is a control mechanism, of the most subtle but extreme sort, that weaves the memory of half-truths into society like the casting of so many spells. We see its expressions endlessly, on network news, in movies, on social media platforms, and hear its refrains in popular music, as we shop for groceries and order coffee in strip malls. Even as our public and private spheres of existence are crafted, quite carefully and with a plan in mind, our view of events is likewise shaped (and reshaped) according to prevailing powers. However, there is also a more poignant and humane way of remembering, wherein a feeling for the past may be cultivated and enjoyed, imbibed as a form of refreshment.



Artifacts of Human Nature

On a Reading of Thomas De Quincey

An effective memoir is a reflection that resonates with power, a recollection that impacts the present moment and prompts the writer to take action, putting pen to paper before forgetfulness takes hold. In most cases, the subject will likely be an experience so deeply felt that it carries universal significance, familial relationships and the vicissitudes of romance often providing the backdrop. Prior to the rise of modern memoir, traditional forms of tragedy and comedy were used by storytellers, and remarked on by numerous critics, none more skilled than Thomas De Quincey.

Before the memoirist recalls the past, a certain understanding about human nature, and the scope of our various social institutions, is essential. For De Quincey, a return to the genre of comedy formed the basis for such knowledge.

Comedy, as the reflex of the current of social life, will shift in correspondence to the shifting movements of civilization. Inevitably, as human intercourse in cities grows more refined, comedy will grow more subtle; it will build itself on distinctions of character less grossly defined, and on features of manners more delicate and impalpable. (1)

Here, we have quite a bit to consider, as the sensibilities of history stand in sharp contrast to those of the modern day. Needless to say, today's social realms bear no resemblance to those of De Quincey. And with that, we can examine his predictions and measure their accuracy.

Now, we will digress to think in terms of montage imagery.

I imagine countless scenes from movies unfolding in rapid succession, before our eyes, actors portraying familiar themes of romance and comedy. In De Quincey's world, the events are urbane and sophisticated, and the artifacts of human nature reflect the glories of a civilization unknown to the present age. However, in our modern comedic montage, slapstick jesting becomes popular during the 1940s, growing more literal and vulgar through the decades. Nowhere in evidence are the delicate and salubrious manners envisioned by De Quincey. The passage above highlights the ways in which he was searching for something imperceptible, a dream that quickly faded. Scholar Elizabeth Fay builds on this notion in her work.

DE QUINCEY'S ENTIRE OEUVRE IS PREMISED ON A CONCEPTION OF the lost thing, that which had been held close - a person, a feeling, a vision - as medically and culturally implicated. From his first mature work Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821) to his late essays on China and India in 1857, he is haunted by the ephemeral. His dreams, hallucinations, and reflections all participate in a kind of nostalgia-laden anxiety disorder that the instabilities of his time fostered, even encouraged, in those who were, or believed themselves, sensitive. (2)

Here, we find the mindset by which De Quincey created his vision of human nature, the sense of loss that gave rise to his nostalgia regarding future events. In many ways, his was an idealization of things to come and an acknowledgement of the past's shortcomings. And what were the deeper reasons for his points of view? According to Fay, it had to do with sensitivity, as well as his "pharmacologically induced dreamworld."

In our time, the poetic, drug-addled soul who creates beautiful images is something of a trope. We anticipate and even reward eccentric behavior from artists, often without realizing that their wild ways are nothing new; the opium-fueled writers of another era are their predecessors. As for De Quincey, he moved among so many intricate subjects and philosophies, with a mind adorned by brilliance and a true command of language, that we must restrain ourselves and focus clearly on a few themes. With that, we move from his critical assessment of culture and comedy to his views on morality, freedom, and England's complex relationship with China around the time of the Opium Wars. We read from "The China Question in 1857":

And, accordingly, upon no one feature of moral temper is the Greek Tragedy more frequent or earnest in its denunciations than upon all expressions of self-glorification or of arrogant disparagement applied to others.

What nation is it, beyond all that ever have played a part on this stage of Earth, which ought, supposing its vision cleansed for the better appreciation of things and persons, to feel itself primarily interested in these Grecian denunciations? What other than China ? (3)

In the previous passage, De Quincey had taken issue with the legalisms of Judaism and Islam, noting that every liberty is restrained by ancient laws of faith, and followed by adherents without question. However, he lauds the Greeks of antiquity, noting that their morality came not from faith but the power of their civilization, this, to his mind, being the superior way. Whether we agree with his opinions or not—and I do not—what stands apparent is the richness of De Quincey's thought process, by which he traverses the fullness of several traditions and leaves no doubt regarding his conclusions. He credits China with being more aligned with ancient Greece than with Jewish or Muslim traditions. And always, his ideas are conveyed by exquisitely elegant prose. The present day offers nothing comparable. So, returning to our initial reflection, what can we say about the artifacts of human nature revealed by De Quincey?

Interestingly, we learned that he found optimism to be a prominent artifact of our nature, a belief he articulated in his reading of comedy. Although the aspects of comedic expression De Quincey identified were insightful, humor being a reflex of social life, he predicted a gradual rise in sophistication that never materialized. Now, we return to Fay's work to examine her ideas a bit further.

In his critical analyses of comedy, De Quincey sought the *lost thing* which was once held with affection, in this case, his belief in the advancement of human sensibilities. Beyond optimism, however, he reveals another important artifact of human nature, which I will identify as *social curiosity*. This artifact is revealed not so much by the content of his essays but according to the insightful nature of his mindset, and the way his prose displays the beauty and complexity of his thoughts. Here, we need only reference his likening of urban development to the advancement of comedic sensibilities. This theme, among many others he develops, speaks to his curiosity regarding people and social institutions.

Finally, we will conclude with the concept of *rational individuality* as a third artifact of human nature revealed by De Quincey. In "The China Question in 1857," he prefaces his analysis of Chinese culture in an interesting manner, by lauding the pagan civic values of Greece and contrasting them to the legalistic underpinnings of Judaism and Islam. In his view, allowing the individual to live apart from monotheistic morality, and the "arrogant disparagement applied to others," was preferable to the following of religious laws and traditions. These outlooks were, of course, quite popular during De Quincey's time and were by no means unique to him, although his style was singular in its eloquence.

Our analysis here has been quite brief, offering a close reading of a few highlighted passages. However, we have identified three artifacts of human nature, expressed by De Quincey, which form the basis for subsequent readings and deeper textual studies. With three artifacts in hand—optimism, social curiosity, and rational individuality—we have a basis to continue our study of human nature, thanks to the work of De Quincey.

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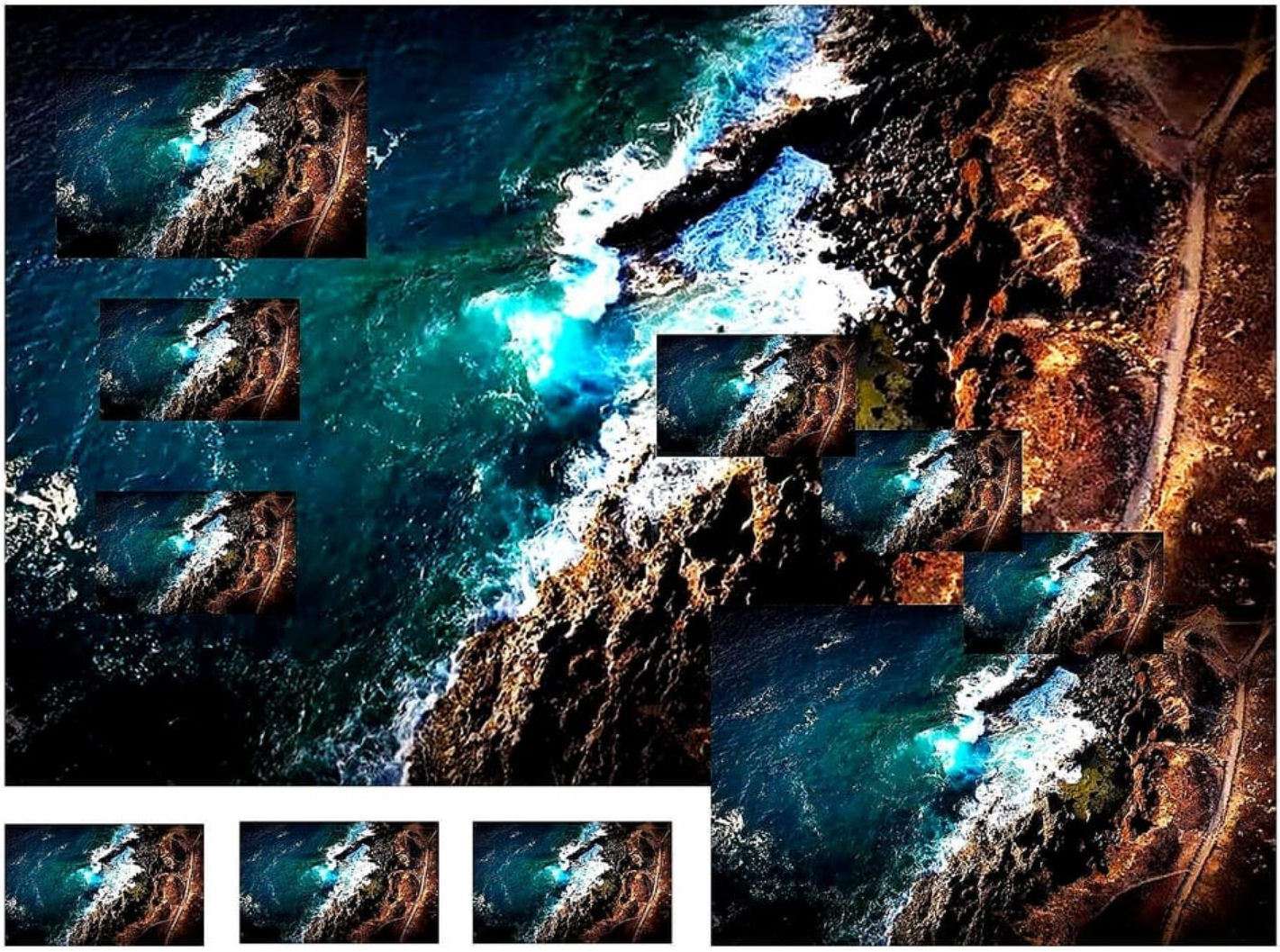


Experimental Language Constructions (1)

Reflections on Presence and Absence (Visual Depiction, Fragrance, and Sound)

Exploring the disciplines, as a nonfiction writer and avid reader, leads one to discover useful methods of analysis. With this in mind, I begin a new subseries, a collection of philosophical musings expressed randomly, often with poetry in mind.

The theoretical basis for this approach is rooted in exploration, at times helping to refine themes for writing and, in many cases, contributing to new research designs. Where can we search for fresh writing topics? How can we begin to analyze and build on existing themes? I use experimental prose constructions to help answer these questions.

In many cases, I like to think visually when doing analytical work, so drawings and photo collages will typically accompany these entries.

A. M. Palmer

Digressions on the Current Theme:

- To think and represent visually, to depict fluid ideas, is to establish presence
within a field of context and to imply meaning, at least on some level.

- Still, however, there is an ambiguity of texture one can attribute to an *olfactory* experience
or, at times, to something *audible*, as both have the power to entice the mind
and to illicit emotional response more fully than they are able to inspire language.

- Time is likely the most relevant variable for this reflection,
as it softens the impact of both *presence* and *absence* while, simultaneously,
adding layers of experience, thought, and emotion to the one who encounters such conditions.

- And to fathom the pain of departure requires, in no small measure,
an understanding of the fullness lost.

- After empathy might come a question regarding the changed state,
the way in which a departed figure cannot return to the life once occupied.

- If they return, there might be the odd whisper that they are not the same, perhaps
having changed in ways unacceptable or, in some cases, having transformed into an imposter.

- A visual record, to which the subject still bears some resemblance,
might help to validate a return to life and the privileges of identity.

- And the fragrance of memory might, within the exile's heart, keep historical selves in mind
and partially relevant, calling out for an eventual reunion.

- Finally,
auditory inclusion lends its own perspective, all things eventually renewed
by the final sense,
some listeners retreating from the music of a favorite movement
to approach sorrow by way of different sounds,
perhaps according to wind
or the dripping of water in a distant place,
a room now occupied in solitude far, far away.

Commentary:

From this construction, I will likely begin to develop themes related to time, empathy, fragrance, and visual records, all of which bear upon the subject of presence and absence. In addition, we can explore these fragmentary themes further by building digital collages to express their various qualities.

Experiential Themes

A Writer’s Journey through Sight, Continuity, and Context

Throughout history, writers have sought solace as well as intellectual inspiration by walking with care through their surroundings, taking note of the landscape and the life it sustains. Moving a bit further into this process, we find that sight, continuity, and context play equally important roles, granting the writer a host of experiential themes to explore while walking through the environment.

Aesthetically speaking, we tend to think of sight as it pertains to the visual arts, although it plays a role in the realm of thought and philosophy, as well, insight being a product of the mind related to vision and clear understanding. Indeed, as a writer, I find the mind’s eye reference of memory and intuition to be endlessly intriguing. Here, I turn to the work of G. J. Warnock and his essay entitled, “Seeing.”

He draws a distinction between the verb "to see" and other transitive verbs by noting:

By contrast, one is inclined to say that one may be said to see at least (1) things (not necessarily material objects; (2) events, happenings, performances; (3) qualities; (4) relations; (5) states or conditions; and (6) facts (including negative facts). (1)

The writer thus wanders through the landscape, seeing the physical realm while also perceiving a number of experiential themes, moving from the exterior world to that of the interior, and back again. Seeing is always a multifaceted process. However, without the introduction of *continuity*, that which is seen will be of little use to the writer.

Continuity, "a continuous operation of seeing and perceiving," is essential if the writer wishes to utilize new material, to describe events, ideas, and features of the landscape to an audience. And how does that process unfold? Here, we will consider the role of sketching ideas after one has seen things in the visual realm, or imagined them within the mind's eye. Jonathan Fish and Stephen Scrivener illuminate the subject of artistic visualizing in one of their recent articles.

The necessity to sketch arises from the need to foresee the results of the synthesis or manipulation of objects without actually executing such operations. The use of words, pictures or models to stand for objects, scenes or events not physically present enormously increases the mind's ability to visualise. The importance of such a system of representation in creative thought increases in proportion to (1) the degree of abstraction or generality of the manipulation involved and (2) the degree of time, difficulty or expense in manipulating the object itself. (2)

To recap, we have found that the writer's journey proceeds from sight, both of the physical variety and as it pertains to the imagination. From this point, the path leads to sketching—either through words or images—in order to establish continuity of thought. Finally, we have the activity of contextualizing, making certain that the sights and insights of the writer will be clear to readers. Happily, this process can be very straightforward. Assigning a context could be as simple as designating a discipline for your piece, calling it history or nature writing, fiction or memoir.

Concluding thoughts:

Experiential themes, derived from the activity of walking and exploring the environment, are essential tools for artists, especially writers. And, when they are studied in light of sight, continuity, and context, the resulting creative expressions can be rich beyond measure.

On the Movements of Autumn Wind

In a certain season, along stretches of high desert,

wind carries desolations with patience into the coming winter,

with gusts that fall away and become no more than a playful breeze.

In light of this seasonal revelation,

can the unchallenged outlook remain?

When traveling with the wind, and moving according to unseen torrents,

perspective is difficult to maintain, but freedom persists.

Swept away by the air,

an unfortunate item will dance according to accident, but still,

with its passions,

delight spectators as if animated by its own volition.

Momentum swirls and halts in a certain manner as seasons change

and green melts into crimson

and amber.

Cubist paintings come to mind on such occasions,

their ability to show multiple perspectives simultaneously

reminding me of the wind's outlook.

From the greatest height,

one might ascend further still — by deeper degrees —

and peer into countless directions

by the hand of autumn wind.

And then would come the winter and a new series of painted images.

However,

the jagged edges would likely remain.

Possibilities

A Journey from the Rainforest to the City

I.

Momentum of shifting thoughts,
and the engagements of time,
the road itself
speaks to the nomad, the wanderer, the drifter,
and all such dreamers of possibility.

And this is where our journey began, not long ago.

As drifters,
we inhabited the forest for a season,
near wildfire,
as if some form of destiny were manifesting at will,
and we
were compelled to wait for its conclusion.

And by the hours,
a hinderance of flames
entered the night of our arrival
and lingered
to darken each intervening sunrise.

Week after week, eruptions of fire remained distant
but still moved patiently throughout the summer.

One resident, known to many a traveling farmhand,
commented on the troubled hours with wisdom.

He had studied secrets of the land as a rancher
and moved throughout Oregon, Idaho, and California, driving his herds
and riding the rodeo circuit with his family in tow.

In the rancher's time, he was indeed a great dreamer of possibilities,
roaming the landscape for prizes and a bit of regional fame,
a storyteller
with the persistent pain of bones improperly healed,
riding a bright blue tractor now
rather than a horse.
He tells us not to worry. Fire is normal, just hit the road and be on your way.

Such was the journey to the rainforest from shadowed pasturelands.

II.

On shores
of gray summer coolness,
water moves in partnership with the air
and leads to another destination, a land
vastly different
and strange according to the texture of its purpose,
interrupting the sea and nourishing trees of immense stature,
upholding high cliffs by decades
and terrible centuries of wind,
standing watch
for children of the future.

The Oregon coast, beautiful in the embrace of fog,
became a place of interest
with banana slugs underfoot in a rainforest alongside the highway,
a page of green wrinkled at the edges like a hidden map of wonders.

But the road insists that we must, once again, be on our way.

III.

Now, we discover the city and add certain contrasting elements to our experience,
of urban noise and commerce and, no less, of architecture as well,
so many hard angles that reach upward for the sake of freedom, places for daily life
and labors of necessity--and love,
traveling all the way to the former glories of Chicago.

After a study of the water tower and shops of North Michigan Avenue,
our respite ends with contrast and contradiction,
a return to the road, leading elsewhere,
with no defined stops along the way.

The dreamer of possibilities has been an old rancher, a forest nomad confined by wildfires,
a street in historical Chicago,
and a reader of all the above,
a character always moving through ideas and vast reaches
of time.

Imaginings

On the Scope of Visual Memory

The fragrance of things remains with us over the years, quite easily, aromas of homecooked meals from childhood, an old apartment--a former lover. All such remembrances can be olfactory. But what about visual memory and the objects of the past?

I pondered this subject the other day, as I approached the mountains of Flagstaff, Arizona, and remarked that they resemble the landscapes of my home. And there was a feeling I recall, as well, a sense of familiarity which remained tangible yet distant, vague and dreamlike. In this manner, visual memory gathers emotions and fragrances from the past, invoking the beauty of recollection.

Writerly Depictions & Nighttime Journeys

I recall the astonishment I experienced upon first reading A. S. Byatt. I was captivated by the way she often describes things in terms of water and light, her visions emerging slowly from illuminated corners of thought--like perilous rising tides. W. G. Sebald uses language in much the same way. As I consider our topic, I use their work as a point of reference, Byatt's novel, *Possession* (and *The Rings of Saturn* by Sebald) offering brilliant commentaries on human experience. In the coming weeks, we will explore these writers at length. For the moment, however, our topic is of a general nature, a momentary reflection on the mind's eye.

In dreams, as in memories, we see things which are not present but strongly implied, and this allows us to appreciate their subtler aspects. That is to say, a memory of one's grandmother might possess few visual details while being rich in emotional content, recalling her aromatic kitchen, the sound of her voice and so forth. Indeed, the visual memory might be hazier than the original experience but far richer in feeling and insight.

Through this process of remembering, we can appreciate the sensation of old relationships more fully, the beautiful kindness of grandmothers or, perhaps, even the cruelty of those we once knew. The remembrance thus becomes a symbolic representation of a person's true qualities, the ineffable substance of heart and mind. However, we must proceed with caution; the process of viewing the past is complicated and fraught with risk.

Recollection helps us to appreciate deeper aspects of relationships and experiences. Yet, there is always the danger that emotional memory (and imagination) will establish a past which never really existed (1). In my opinion, however, if we are careful with the process of remembering, much can be gained. For example, although a vast segment of time may separate grandchild from grandmother, the former can appreciate the latter more fully through the gifts of memory. And what are we to make of this?

Our thoughts--and dreams--are littered with images, amalgamations of memory and the residue of nighttime journeys, like a montage sequence that remains unresolved. The mind seems to function in this manner. Perhaps this is why our electronics operate and engage us in a certain way, like a watery expanse of ideas and snippets of conversation calling out for context. And now, we digress.

Into the Abstraction of Dreams

The conceptual aspect of abstraction is telling; it implies that something far deeper than the appearance of things awaits us. We can lift the cloak of reality, the obvious shape and texture of life, and discover an intangible essence. With this in mind, I reference an insightful article, a case study of ideas entitled, "Abstraction, 1910-1925: Eight Statements." Now, we proceed into the realm of modernist thought. And what can we learn here? For starters, the promise of dreams offered artists of the twentieth century a break, a reprieve from suffering.

Modernism, the movement that gave rise to and codified abstract painting, witnessed the horrors of the twentieth century; new technologies transforming war into global genocide, political upheaval and the displacement of populations, questions about freedom and human dignity rising with urgency. With this in mind, it makes sense that artists turned from the harsh glare of realism to embrace the beauty of unseen realms, things softly implied but never fully realized.

For the critic Clement Greenberg, the development of abstraction grew out of modernism's effort to define "within each medium . . . effects exclusive to itself." A clear ethos is implied: "Realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art," whereas modernism spoke truthfully at the level of medium, using "art to call attention to art" (2).

To my mind, this concern over artistic media, and the motivations of form, points to the realm of dreams. The changeable ways of content and form are similar to the fluid aspects of dreamlife. Moreover, artists are often inspired by nighttime montages and the secrets they reveal. The article continues by addressing the theme of purity and independence:

(. . .) defining the unique nature of each medium rendered it "pure," assuring both quality and independence from other art forms in which the potential for various forms of instrumentalization—commodification or political cooption—was rife (3).

Here, I find a rich cross-section of ideas, a mingling of imaginary elements with political realities, a realm where creative freedom is curtailed by manipulation. Indeed, when objects, ideas, and situations are removed from their familiar contexts--and translated into the painter's language--their true story unfolds. Along with independence, purity of expression characterizes the realm of imagination--to a high degree if not entirely.

And, speaking of dream content in the visual arts, we must nod in appreciation to the work of Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. As members of a vibrant avant-garde community, their use of color and treatments of form inspired many.

Returning to Visual Memory

In the life of dreams, and in the shadow of waking remembrances, visual elements of the past arise with ease. They arrive in the form of symbols, realistic impressions, and abstractions, blending into a mutable set of visions. Have you experienced this fascinating exercise of the mind? If so, where did the journey lead you? Again, in my estimation, memory stands in close relation to artistic expression, and to the philosophies attending it, as well. The scope of visual memory encompasses personal and world history in equal measures.

Endnotes:

(1) True, it can be argued that no recollection is ever completely faithful to the event in question. However, strong approximations can be established, some memories being more accurate and factual than others.

(2) "Abstraction, 1910—1925: Eight Statements" Author(s): Leah Dickerman, YVE- ALAIN BOIS, MASHA CHLENOVA, CHRISTOPH COX, HAL FOSTER, MARK FRANKO, PETER GALISON, PHILIPPE-ALAIN MICHAUD, Sam Cate Gumpert and R. H. QUAYTMAN Source: October, Winter 2013, Vol. 143, *Abstraction* (Winter 2013), pp. 3-51 Published by: The MIT Press Stable.

(3) Ibid.

Additional Thoughts on "Abstraction, 1910-1925: Eight Statements"

The substance of this article is vast and goes well beyond the boundaries of our reflection.

As the piece continues, Yve-Alain Bois goes on to discuss the rise of the avant-garde, citing the German Romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He proceeds from the Greenbergian premise that abstraction is the ultimate destiny of art (p. 7). The article guides us as we examine deeper aspects of modernist art, not least the depiction of people.

As we continue with our study of Kandinsky and Klee, we will consider the question of the human form, where (and how) it emerges in the modernist tradition.

Figurative Representations & Beyond (p. 4)

Beyond the abandonment of the figure--or various representations of figurative elements--there was the question of what, exactly, abstract artists sought to abandon, if not the human form itself. Did they wish to transform our overall impressions of the world, abandoning older conventions of thought and perception? Or were they mainly concerned with reinterpreting ordinary elements and offering new contexts for them? We will continue our exploration of these themes at a later date.

New Levels of Abstraction

Although color was a prominent aspect of their work, both Kandinsky and Klee articulated forms which, in stunning fashion, spoke to the content of dreams. The latter's treatment of the human figure carried abstraction to new levels, as he paired these elements with rich overlays of color and new inventions, the imaginative mechanical renderings for which he is known.

Urban Reliquary

On the Decline of Cities and Ideals

At present, one can see multifarious images of decline across the nation, documentaries of cities once regarded for their beauty and high industrial output, the charm of their neighborhoods, and the promise they offered to society. Now, many of them are nearly in ruins. San Francisco, Midtown Manhattan, Los Angeles--which now occupies a category of its own--Gary, Indiana, and Detroit, Michigan all exist as mere shadows of their former selves. With that in mind, we might call the images assembled above something of a reliquary, a container of the ideals that once defined our nation.

Regarding the Protestant Establishment (E. Digby Baltzell)

First, it's essential to realize that the ideals of our nation are, in my estimation, two-fold in nature, in that the outward values of patriotism and hard work contrast--rather sharply--the ideals by which the powerful govern society. In short, the greater part of the population has been manipulated to live by myths, that is to say, taught to embrace deliberate misrepresentations of outwardly positive values. And while the population was gradually consumed by deception, the wealthy built cities and infrastructures to suit their desires. The ruins we see as a feature of late capitalism reflect this two-fold system, myths for the populace and the accumulation of wealth and power for the privileged few. This is a simplified but telling assessment of the "Protestant establishment," the power structure that offered certain benefits to the multitudes once, rather long ago. We consider them here, in their essence.

Commerce and finance brought us some of our most outstanding examples of architecture, a favorite of mine being the Seagram Building in Midtown Manhattan, a modernist construction that exemplifies the beauty and simplicity of functionalism. A collaborative effort that included the work of Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, its glass curtain walls of commerce became something of an icon, a testament to postwar prosperity. Or, we can go back a generation to Louis Sullivan and the Chicago School, the designers who gave us early examples of vertical architecture, ornate structures reaching skyward with aspiration. Under Sullivan's influence, grand buildings were able to convey the establishment's values—power and draconian influence exercised by the few over the many—while containing multitudes of workers, whose labor produced wealth they had little opportunity to enjoy. At any rate, our cities are still possessed of modernist masterpieces, as well as earlier works, the ideals of which echo through the decades, all the way to the present day.

Ideals in Decline

I recall the pleasure I once took in strolling through Midtown Manhattan, or exploring the shops of North Michigan Avenue in Chicago, chapters of history unfolding before me in the guise of tall buildings, their shadows falling on the streets below. Indeed, if those walls could talk. Sadly, I have not visited our once glorious cities in a number of years, but even on my last trips I noted evidence of continuing decline. However, one must ask what the basis of this loss entails, where the root of the problem can be found.

Undeniably, urban decline pertains to complex social and economic factors, analyses beyond the scope of this personal essay. However, in my estimation, we can regard the loss of ideals as a key factor, a precursor to the decay of cities. As noted previously, the ideals of patriotism, hard work, and civic responsibility were, for many years, distorted and misrepresented, converted to the uses of propaganda. Indeed, after decades of what can reasonably be called social engineering, we find that the table scraps once granted to the multitudes have now practically disappeared. Our cities have fallen.

Yes, the ideals (or manipulations) symbolized by our greatest works of architecture have now fallen away, leaving us with crumbling structures and fading shadows of prosperity. To be fair, it is reductionist to say that the decline of ideals leads to the decline of cities, but there is something to be said for the correlation, a poetic theme that leads from loss to loss and sorrow to sorrow. How different our current age is from the years of postwar prosperity.

Departing "The American Century"

How did we move from the bold expressions of the Chicago School, and the exuberance of mid-century modernism, to our present state of regression? In closing, we will venture into another historical reflection.

The Second World War, although the most horrific event of a troubled century, occasioned the prospering of the United States. Revitalizing the nation's economy after the Great Depression, it established a mechanized era and, through the GI Bill, made higher education available to returning veterans. For the first time, members of the working class could enter a variety of professions from the medical world to legal practice and the sciences. From there, the generation born during the 1920s, who came of age on distant battlefields, built the United States more richly and extensively than any other. And they did so because their sacrifices were honored by the nation they served. In those days, our nation's ideals pertained to faith, courage, honor, care of one's family, hard work, and planning for the future. How times have changed.

We have recently departed the previous age of wonders, the triumph and progress achieved by our parents.

At any rate, *the American Century*, defined as such by Henry Luce, (founder of *Time* and *Life* magazines) was underwritten by a strong middle-class of the sort unknown in our nation prior to the postwar era. And these men and women--who labored in the grand buildings noted earlier-- were able to purchase homes, strengthen the economy, send their children to college, save for the future, and retire to the glorious sunsets of Arizona and Florida. It was indeed the century of American influence, a time unto itself, which was by no means unencumbered by violence and injustice--to say the least. We will examine Mr. Luce and the twentieth century in greater detail later. For the moment, however, we continue with our reflection.

Arguably, ideals underwrite progress, and their loss both causes and reflects a state of decline.

Visual Features of the Urban Reliquary:

Passages and doorways given to darkness.

Graffiti from unseen travelers who occupy the ruins.

The beauty of a forgotten time lingering in photos and scattered memories.

Architectural Memory Defined

Thoughts on Lewis Mumford and Michael Sorkin

In the mode of reflection, we will explore an introduction to the work of Lewis Mumford and Michael Sorkin, two scholars of architecture who spoke to the innovations of their time. For this examination, we will touch upon key ideas from both, considering the ways in which they defined recent architectural memory.

I recall my introduction to Mumford, which took place while I was studying history and museum work in graduate school. We had recently delved into material culture studies and discussed the work of Thomas Schlereth, citing his methods of artifact analysis. Then, we read *Technics and Civilization* by Mumford, my professor regarding the book as *a museum rendered in prose*. So, who was this once influential figure who is now somewhat forgotten?

Not surprisingly, Mumford, born in 1895, was an inquisitive lad who explored New York extensively with his grandfather, examining the details of the city from a young age.

By the time he was 20, he was systematically exploring the City on foot, making notes on its neighborhood life, studying its buildings, bridges, and street plans, and taking specimens for an amateur geological survey of Manhattan. He studied at City College, Columbia University, and the New School, concentrating on subjects that interested him rather than those required for a degree. (1)

Regarded as an urbanist, whose analyses were focused on the history, design, and material culture of civilizations, Mumford received the National Book Award in 1961 for *The City in History*, from which we learn:

The city came as a definite emergent in the paleo-neolithic community: an emergent in the definite sense that Lloyd Morgan and William Morton Wheeler used that concept. In emergent evolution, the introduction of a new factor does not just add to the existing mass, but produces an over-all change, a new configuration, which alters its properties. (2)

After reading the introduction to Mumford's award-winning book, one can easily imagine him traversing the streets of New York in his youth, gathering data and beginning to develop ideas about civilizations, the substance of which would help to establish his career. His ambition was considerable.

By way of reflection, I note here that Mumford's tendency, as a scholar, is to assess great swathes of history and cultural development, often associating his modes of analysis with evolutionary theory and the work of allied thinkers. Like many scholars of his generation, Mumford assumed that progress was an established law of history, forward momentum being the rule rather than the exception. For this reason, I regard him as an agent of indoctrination, albeit one of vast intellectual capabilities. To his credit, he was thorough.

Throughout his writings, Mumford offered copious amounts of detail, his study of Egypt and Mesopotamian culture bearing witness. Indeed, through the descriptive prose of *The City in History*, readers are transported to distant regions of time in vivid fashion.

'Insecurity' and 'intimidation' were written all over the Mesopotamian record: even the school maintained a functionary with a lash to keep order. (3)

For this reference, Mumford offers no source, neither primary nor secondary, but nonetheless instructs his audience with eloquence and more than a hint of persuasion. And this is the tone of his oeuvre, incisive, pontifical, geared towards sweeping assessments, and often lacking sources. He was established as a public intellectual, positioned in academia to address the educated classes, in the same manner as mid-twentieth century journalist Walter Lippman, or Neil deGrasse Tyson of recent fame.

Regarded as more of an urbanist than an architectural critic, Mumford's reading of buildings and their place in society was quite influential in his day. Although lacking any sort of university degree, he was still able to find

publishers for his books and serve as a visiting professor at MIT and the University of Pennsylvania's School of Fine Arts. As for honors, he received more than one can mention in a brief essay, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which he received in 1964. Interestingly, Mumford was also granted the status of honorary Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE), using his platform as visiting professor and decorated writer to speak out against injustice and protest the war in Vietnam. When I consider the number of brilliant scholars who labored through doctoral studies, earning degrees in order to teach and publish their work—and instead wound up laboring at Walmart and teaching as adjuncts—I find the story of Mumford all the more interesting.

Clearly, he was brilliant, and accomplished but perhaps most noteworthy for having been propped up by the power structure. Was he an activist or just a useful instrument of controlled opposition?

From our brief and admittedly discursive view of his career, we can design a reading plan to study the work of Mumford more methodically.

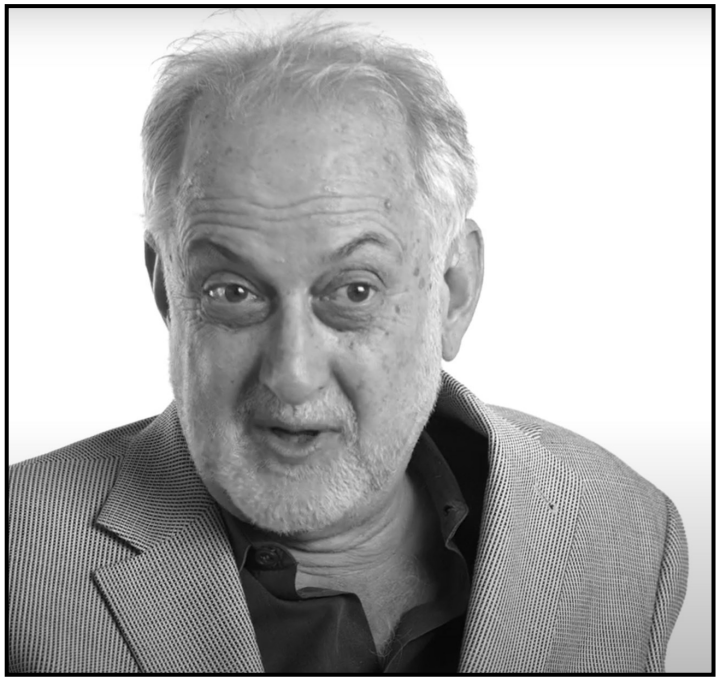
"The origins of the city are obscure, and in trying to trace them we must fall back on fragmentary evidence."

(Lewis Mumford)

- *The Study of Utopia*, 1922 (his first book)
- *City Development*, 1945
- *The City in History*, 1961 (National Book Award)
- *Sticks and Stones*, 1924
- *Technics and Civilization*, 1934

These are the books which I have selected as an introduction to his writings, placed in thematic rather than chronological order. On the whole, his career helped to define our modern architectural memory, not least for the numerous civic and academic positions Mumford held. One simply cannot overstate the scope of his intellectual influence. For my part, I enjoy the way he combined aesthetic commentary with practical evaluations regarding the function of buildings and infrastructure. That Mumford was able to become a spokesman for humanitarian issues, reaching far beyond his role as a building and design scholar, is indicative of the previous age, a time when certain favored individuals could succeed apart from traditional routes.

From here, we move to the next generation, the inheritors of mid-century culture, who addressed issues of urban violence and decline in their own way.



"We could breed a little slower, and we could consume a little slower."

(Michael Sorkin)

Born in 1948, architect, urban designer, and writer Michael Sorkin theorized the task of re-envisioning architecture after 911. Along those lines, his book, *Starting from Zero: Reconstructing Downtown New York,* raised issues of great interest to city planners as well as architects, not the least of which had to do with the moral dimensions of these professions.

THIS TRAGEDY HAS A PARTICULAR BEARING FOR US AS ARCHITECTS: BUILDINGS CAUSED THE DEATHS OF THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE. We are forced to examine fundamental assumptions, about the integrity of structure, about the logic of such concentrations of people, about height. What exactly is our responsibility here? (4)

Sorkin goes on to consider the strange beauty of twisted metal, the urgency of judging ourselves as we set about the task of ascribing judgment, and the danger of regarding terrorists as "implacably other." However, since the publication of *Starting from Zero* in 2013, a great deal has transpired, from deep analysis of the September 11th implosions—quite a bit regarding Building 7—to the COVID 19 "pandemic" and the events of October 7th, 2023 in Israel. The world has truly become far more complex. And yet, as I consider Sorkin's critical work, I am amazed by the foreshadowing he offered, his quote on reproduction and our consumption of resources coming readily to mind.

As an architect, he addressed the issue of *sustainability* when the term first gained currency. Although it is now a less popular buzzword, the concept remains viable among design and planning theorists. Their typical narratives involve dire warnings about unchecked population growth; the need to live and build in harmony with the environment; the bleakness of late capitalism; the responsibility of architects to create public spaces that people actually enjoy, from both functional and aesthetic standpoints; and speculative assertions about technology, most often pertaining to artificial intelligence. Like Mumford, Sorkin takes architecture as a point of departure, moving into realms of philosophy and hinting at the relationship between sustainability and population control. And perhaps architects and urban planners are uniquely qualified to pontificate, being arbiters of taste as well as voices of reason for futurists. Mumford and Sorkin both settled comfortably into these roles during their respective careers, even setting a standard for future generations of architects to follow. Now, let's consider how they contribute to our definition of architectural memory.

For our purposes, we can define the legacy of Mumford and Sorkin in the following way: It stands as a form of *cultural memory* rendered in city planning and the built environment, based on numerous theories, and established with philosophical continuity and future generations in mind.

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(3) ibid. (p. 83)

(4) Sorkin, Michael. *Starting from Zero: Reconstructing Downtown New York* (New York: Routledge) 2013 (p. 15).

* The quotation accompanying the screenshot of Lewis Mumford is from "Myth of the Machine." The quotation accompanying the screenshot of Michael Sorkin is taken from a 2013 interview, which he granted upon receiving a National Design Award for that year. The video is entitled "Michael Sorkin on Design."

For Further Reading (A Note on Lewis Mumford and Sir Patrick Geddes) :

In order to understand the outlook Mumford held throughout his career, specifically, his philosophical approach to urban and architectural design, it's important to study his relationship with Patrick Geddes, an innovator who is widely regarded as the father of modern city planning. Born in 1854, the Scottish intellectual used his knowledge of sociology, biology, and geography as a basis for developing his work in urban design. Much like Fredrick Law Olmsted in the United States, Geddes believed that greenspaces should be incorporated into towns and cities, granting nature a primary role in the lives of citizens. If you choose to pursue additional studies in the area, read *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence*, edited by Frank G. Novak, Jr.

The Texture of Memory and Time

In the same way that Cubist painters depicted their subjects from numerous angles, capturing them in a single moment of time, the memoirist chooses overlapping themes to explore. Indeed, something about the texture of memory and time encourages artists to create in certain ways, revealing an image as it might have been, long ago. .

Memory, as we have noted previously, remains discursive, existing like a montage of film images in countless minds. From shared experiences, it overlaps from one person to the next and helps to define the qualities of a society or a given period of time. We can say that memory—as an aspect of material culture—is simultaneously fluid and dense, flowing endlessly as streams of thought while, at times, transforming into the heaviness of lived experience. Now, consider the image above, the mosaic of forms that accompanies this essay.

In all manner of visual depiction, we find that time is captured in segments and held in place for the viewer to study. Memory is nothing more (or less) than continuing this process, moving through a series of thoughts and images, often with little attention to order.

With so many contradicting characteristics, time and memory remain challenging to express in artistic formats. However, writers and painters have infinite materials available for use.

In the collage accompanying this piece, what do you see? Fragments of a city in transition? Broken waterways subsiding into forests and the shadow of tall buildings? Perhaps the piece brings certain memories into your awareness. In any event, consider the texture it presents, a vision of fractured cityscapes.

Night Wolves

A Few Digressions

As the late hours enter avenues of darkness, night wolves are invoked.

I'm intrigued by the city lights that defy stars and promise pleasure to the traveler, one who ventures down streets of the night in search of . . . whatever. Often, the neon surrounding such adventuresome souls is of pink and purple, a form of persuasion used by casinos and bars the world over. For some reason, these colors are easy to follow, wherever they lead, concealing the lair of wolves as only the softer shades can. I suppose it's no surprise. After all, who would be tempted by the harshness of mustard yellow or olive green?

If certain colors invite closeness, and others convey a difficult sense of separation, what about the various perspectives offered by the camera? Surely, they impact the traveler, as well. Were it not for countless urban photographs of bars and crowded streets, the dark hours might be a bit less enthralling. But are the images trustworthy depictions?

Whispers of the Coming Night . . .

The distant cityscape can be deceptive, the light being remarkable for its beauty. One could easily dive into the scene, from high above, touching curtain walls of gold and falling to the streets below. And the wolves would be patient, awaiting your arrival into their neon hunting grounds.

And yet, the hunters would have no advantage, were it not for the contrasts of city life, the darkness of sorrow enlivened by a sense of anticipation. Without fail, nighttime exuberance dissolves into the spaces of morning. Herein, we recall that predators make use of beauty, if they are shrewd--like those fabled wolves of the darkness.

As morning arrives, the hunters generally depart with ease. And the crowds upon which they prey likewise give way to the sun. However, the chase will continue. Contrasting images of light and shadow bring whispers of the coming night.

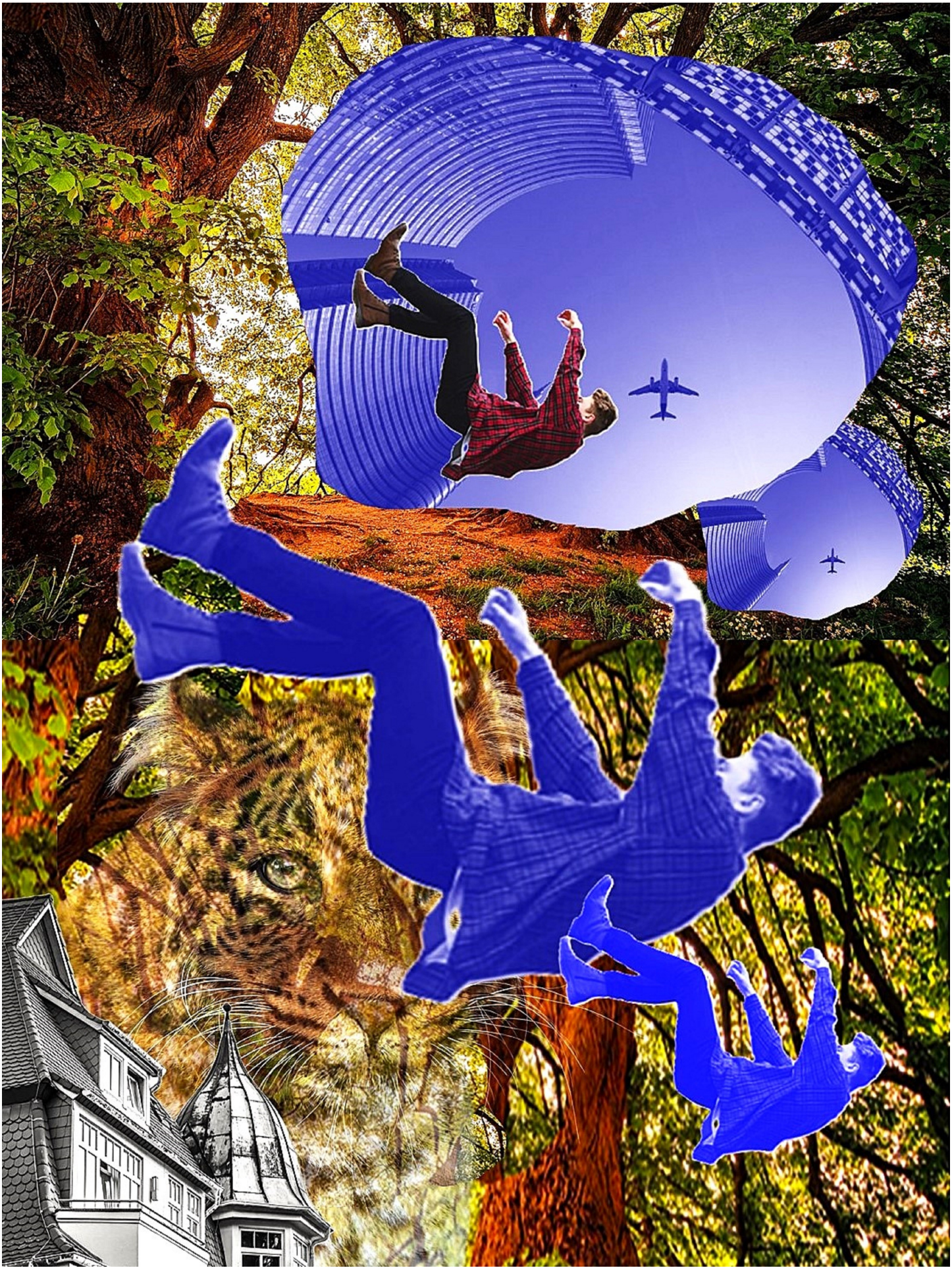
Image Narratives

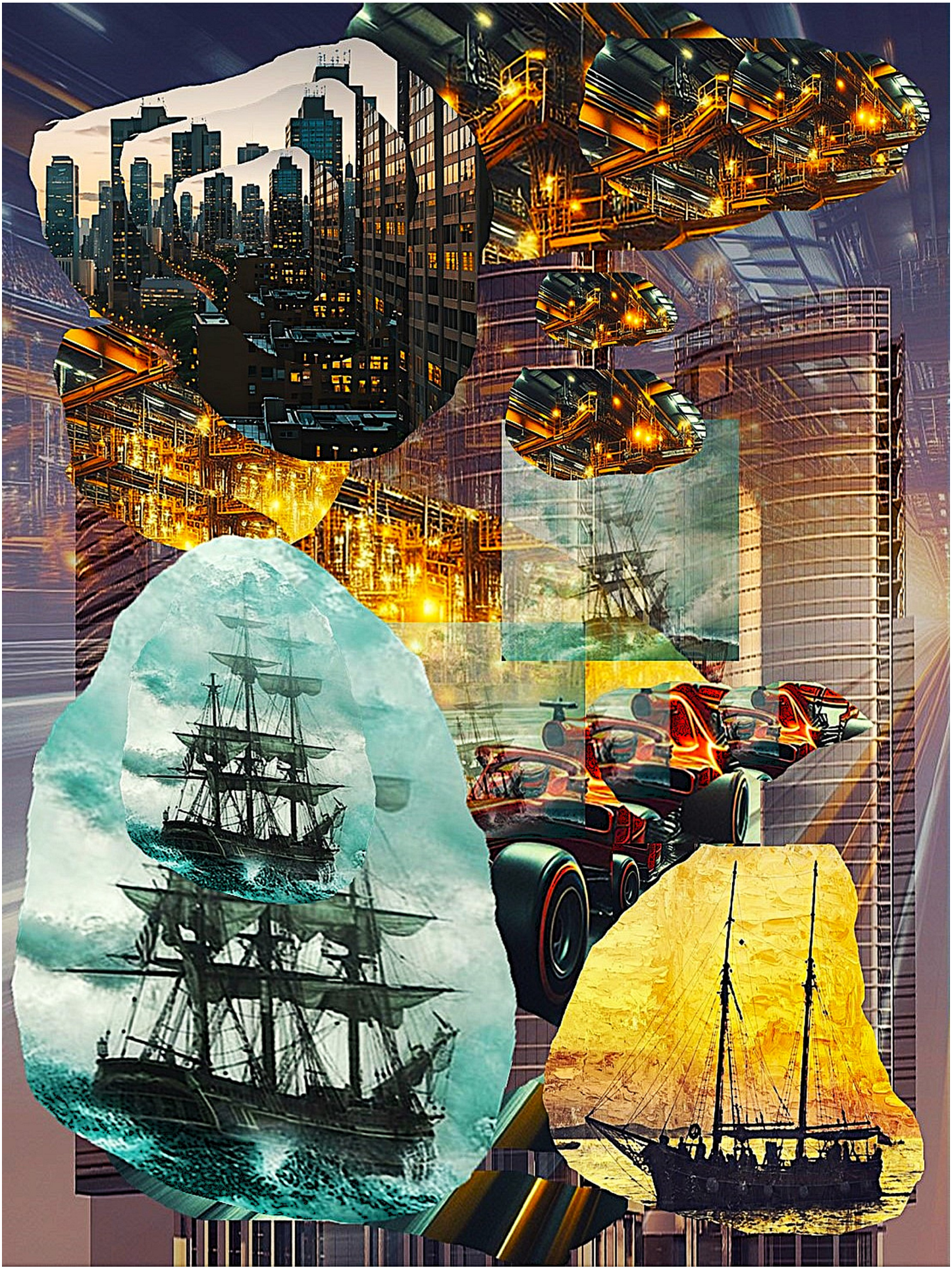
Interlude of Imagination

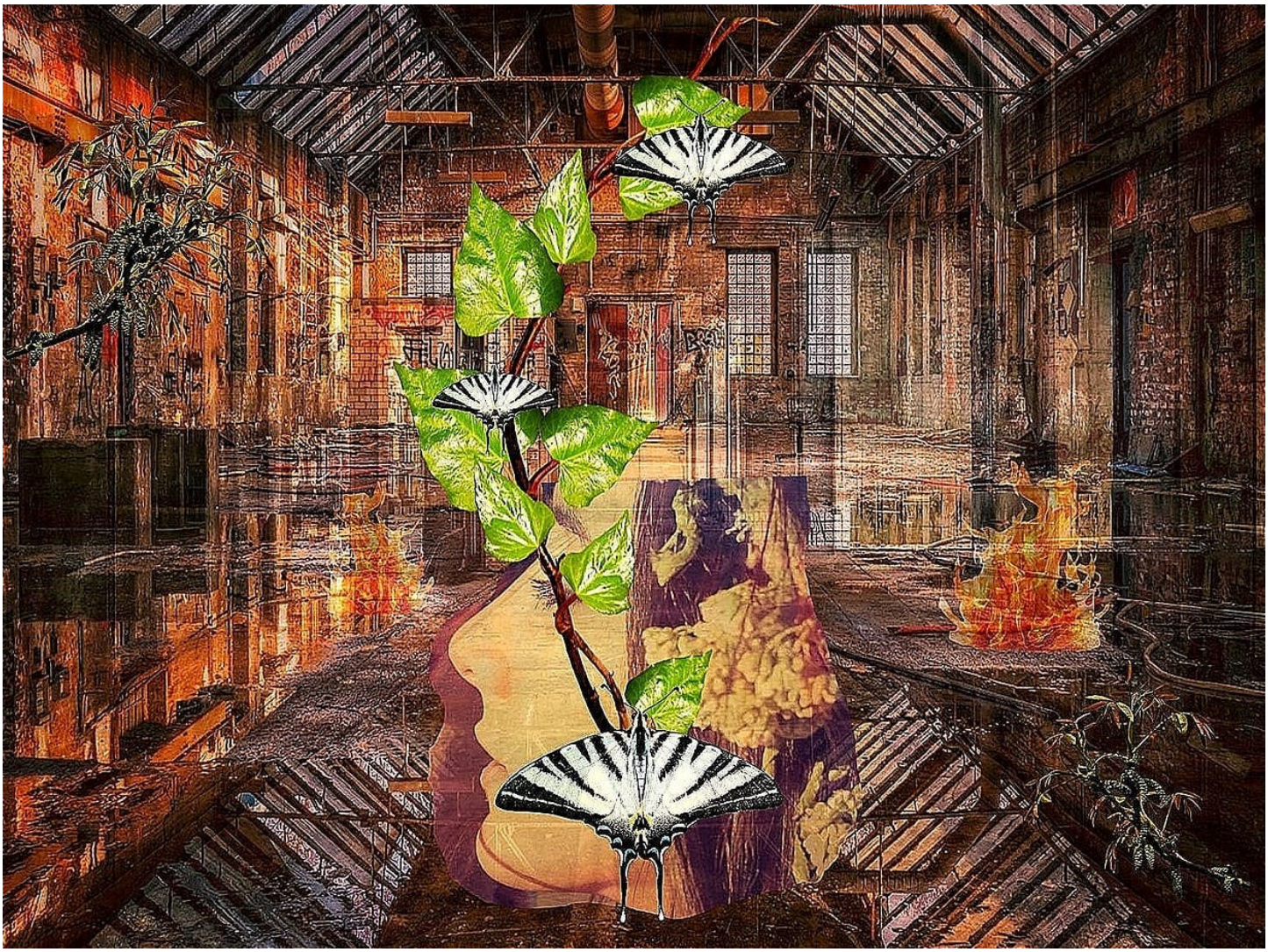
A Study of Photographs in Fragmentation

And the protagonist falls through the visions
of a changing environment, cursed
by the elements of endless possibilities . . .

As a collage artist, one who uses fragmented and decontextualized images to create my narratives, I find that image essays present unique challenges while, at the same time, offering opportunities to construct new landscapes. I began "Interlude of Imagination" with this in mind, using a series of graphics and fragments to develop ideas, the first having to do with the theme of motion and free-falling within a changing environment. From there, I expanded the narrative to include the movement of vehicles, always with attention to light and depth and the creation of textured surfaces. From there, the story moves through industrial spaces, art, music, and the lights of Chinatown in the winter.







The Winter Passage

Quartzsite Arizona Photo Essay

Contradictions of the desert
remain from season to season.

Living on the road full-time causes one to appreciate mild climates, specifically the winter haven of Quartzsite, Arizona, where the scorching deserts of summer transform into pleasant afternoons from November through March. During my first season, I took note of the surrounding community, the small businesses that struggle to remain solvent from year to year, the sense of desperation among locals, as well as the affluence of certain visitors who bring their desert toys with them. Taken in combination, all of these contrasts invited me to create a photo essay.

Imagine

QUIET TIMES
Retiring
this is our
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Highlights & Narratives

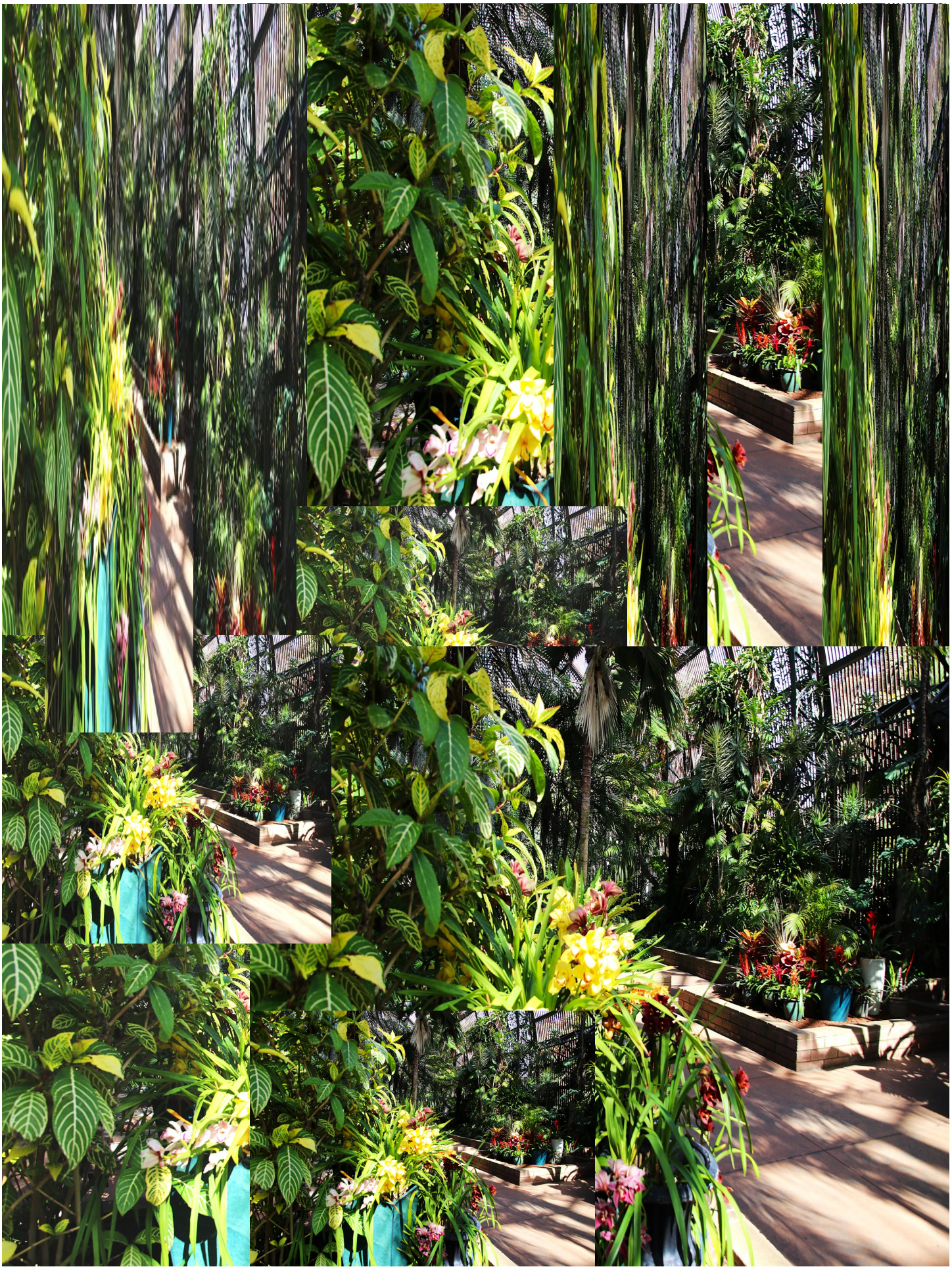
A Photo Essay

Photography is very much an art of happenstance, as one captures a moment in time, creating an image for posterity. As for what determines a "good" photo rather than a "bad" one, I'm still not sure. Technically precise pictures sometimes leave one cold and without any sense of connection to the subject. By contrast, candid images often lack detail and compositional elements. However, as a storyteller, I enjoy the journey of experimentation above all else, testing shapes for their narrative impact, examining intrusions of light for their influence on the frame. The sheer delight of discovery never ends. Speaking of discovery, I can still recall my first attempts at photographing animals.

Accessible Wildlife

After beginning my journey into photography, I decided to experiment with macro techniques, magnifying what would typically be overlooked by the viewer. This snail was fair game, as it slowly advanced through my neighbor's garden. Wildlife photography is rarely this easy.

While working as a municipal park ranger at La Jolla Shores, I enjoyed photographing sea lions in their natural habitat. At times, they almost appeared to pose and eagerly await my attention. The juvenile pictured below assumed this position with desultory ease, shortly after he bluff-charged me for encroaching on his territory.



Puzzle Section

Wolves

Canis lupus; mammal; carnivore; sheep; alpha; habitat; hierarchical; vocalizational; pack; weaning; blastomycosis; Canidae; den; carrion; opportunistic; prey; mange; predatory; ecosystem; howl; subspecies; Animalia; regional; pups; territorial; meat

n	a	n	i	m	a	l	i	a	l	g	a	i	s	u	b	s	p	e	c	i	e	s	a	s	c	i
o	a	r	s	i	e	n	a	d	f	a	e	o	s	i	l	m	e	p	o	w	a	f	o	h	a	b
i	o	p	p	g	r	u	m	a	m	l	n	j	h	i	s	r	e	g	o	i	p	u	t	a	r	c
r	b	g	n	u	a	v	o	c	w	e	a	o	s	u	b	o	e	c	o	s	d	o	a	h	n	u
r	t	a	c	a	f	d	e	n	e	a	p	o	i	e	e	p	c	a	n	i	d	a	e	w	i	o
a	m	h	a	b	i	s	u	b	n	o	p	r	e	g	a	i	o	y	d	e	t	e	m	r	v	m
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u	v	o	c	a	l	i	z	a	t	i	o	n	b	l	a	s	a	l	p	y	a	h	o	w	l	b
p	r	e	d	a	t	o	r	y	h	a	b	s	h	e	e	r	e	g	i	o	p	e	e	h	s	a

n	a	n	i	m	a	l	i	a	l	g	a	i	s	u	b	s	p	e	c	i	e	s	a	s	c	i
o	a	r	s	i	e	n	a	d	f	a	e	o	s	i	l	m	e	p	o	w	a	f	o	h	a	b
i	o	p	p	g	r	u	m	a	m	i	n	j	h	i	s	r	e	g	o	i	p	u	t	a	r	c
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u	v	o	c	a	l	i	z	a	t	i	o	n	b	l	a	s	a	l	p	y	a	h	o	w	l	b
p	r	e	d	a	t	o	r	y	h	a	b	s	h	e	e	r	e	g	i	o	p	e	e	h	s	a

Architecture

amphitheater; arch; Art Nouveau; balustrade; belfry; midcentury; modern; formwork; concrete; brise soleil; buttress; porch;

a	r	t	n	o	u	v	e	a	u	a	r	n	e	t	n	o	u	v	a	m	o	d	n	r	e
f	o	r	w	m	b	e	l	r	e	g	r	i	c	a	r	a	r	e	i	s	u	b	r	o	c
p	e	r	s	o	m	i	d	c	e	n	t	u	r	y	e	l	e	v	i	o	s	i	p	o	r
d	e	c	o	n	t	e	g	h	f	o	r	e	t	e	r	c	n	o	c	a	r	t	i	p	e
n	o	u	v	b	e	l	f	a	l	i	e	l	o	s	e	s	i	r	b	d	o	r	p	i	a
y	r	f	l	e	b	e	l	g	a	e	m	i	d	c	e	a	r	g	e	g	r	e	s	s	i
s	t	r	u	t	a	l	s	i	d	c	o	r	c	a	r	y	a	t	i	d	s	o	p	h	d
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a	b	u	t	t	r	e	s	s	d	e	c	o	n	s	t	r	u	c	t	i	v	i	s	m	i
c	a	n	t	i	l	e	v	e	r	i	n	g	r	e	s	t	r	u	a	i	c	t	u	r	l

Solution

a	r	t	n	o	u	v	e	a	u	a	r	n	e	t	n	o	u	v	a	m	o	d	n	r	e
f	o	r	w	m	b	e	l	r	e	g	r	i	c	a	r	a	r	e	i	s	u	b	r	o	c
p	e	r	s	o	m	i	d	c	e	n	t	u	r	y	e	l	e	v	i	o	s	i	p	o	r
d	e	c	o	n	t	e	g	h	f	o	r	e	t	e	r	c	n	o	c	a	r	t	i	p	e
n	o	u	v	b	e	l	f	a	l	i	e	l	o	s	e	s	i	r	b	d	o	r	p	i	a
y	r	f	l	e	b	e	l	g	a	e	m	i	d	c	e	a	r	g	e	g	r	e	s	s	i
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d	o	r	i	c	b	e	l	a	h	a	i	g	h	i	a	r	t	i	u	y	o	e	g	r	e
a	f	p	e	f	o	m	r	s	b	e	l	u	s	t	c	d	o	k	r	o	w	m	r	o	f
m	o	d	p	a	m	t	i	o	c	a	n	t	l	a	n	e	l	e	v	a	t	i	o	n	e
f	o	r	a	t	s	a	m	p	t	h	e	a	d	b	r	i	s	a	r	e	c	h	a	e	c
p	e	i	e	u	c	a	r	h	r	a	i	e	u	p	o	r	c	h	a	r	e	i	c	h	e
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h	e	a	i	p	o	r	i	a	m	p	h	i	t	h	e	a	t	e	r	o	b	r	i	a	s
a	b	u	t	t	r	e	s	s	d	e	c	o	n	s	t	r	u	c	t	i	v	i	s	m	i
c	a	n	t	i	l	e	v	e	r	i	n	g	r	e	s	t	r	u	a	i	c	t	u	r	l

Writers . . .

Pushkin; Hemmingway; Steinbeck; Kafka; Wolfe; Sebald; Poe; Dostoevsky; prize; disestablishment; Frost; Byatt; edit; Dickens; Hughes; Parker; Palmer; Musil; Shakespeare; Montaigne; Lopez; Christie; Dr. Seuss; Orwell; Twain; Austen; Fitzgerald, Auden

m	u	s	l	i	p	a	l	m	e	r	l	o	p	z	a	l	m	i	a	s	e	b	a	l	d
k	a	f	t	a	u	c	h	r	i	a	r	o	s	t	i	e	k	a	n	d	l	i	u	r	i
a	u	f	r	o	s	t	t	a	y	b	p	a	o	e	h	a	t	c	a	t	h	e	r	r	s
p	o	k	e	j	h	u	g	h	e	s	t	w	a	i	f	a	h	i	e	s	e	u	q	r	e
h	e	i	g	r	k	h	e	m	m	i	n	a	s	k	a	r	n	o	a	b	a	u	s	t	s
r	o	i	e	d	i	t	w	a	i	m	e	g	a	n	i	e	p	a	g	i	n	e	d	u	a
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m	u	s	l	i	p	a	l	m	e	r	l	o	p	z	a	l	m	i	a	s	e	b	a	l	d
k	a	f	t	a	u	c	h	r	i	a	r	o	s	t	i	e	k	a	n	d	l	i	u	r	i
a	u	f	r	o	s	t	t	a	y	b	p	a	o	e	h	a	t	c	a	t	h	e	r	r	s
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s	h	k	a	e	r	e	s	h	a	k	e	s	p	e	a	r	e	s	u	h	l	a	b	e	s
p	a	r	y	k	a	r	d	o	s	t	o	e	v	s	k	y	a	w	g	n	i	m	m	e	h
p	u	s	k	h	i	u	h	e	m	m	w	o	l	e	f	a	u	d	t	b	l	i	s	u	m
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d	i	s	e	s	t	a	b	l	i	s	h	m	e	n	t	f	r	o	s	p	r	i	z	i	e

Logic Game: The Educational Outing

Building A will host a mechanical exhibit on Monday. **Building B** will host a mechanical exhibit on Saturday. On Friday, **Building C** will host a botanical lecture. On Thursday, **buildings B and C** will host both mechanical exhibits and botanical lectures. On Tuesday and Sunday, **Building C** will host a painting class. On Wednesday, **buildings A and B** will both host mechanical exhibits and botanical lectures. On Friday, **Building B** is scheduled to host both a mechanical exhibit and a botanical lecture.

Which of the following statements are true:

A) If Mary wishes to attend a mechanical exhibit only on one day, and a mechanical exhibit and a painting class on the next day, she will be able to do so by visiting buildings A and C.

B) If John wishes to attend both a mechanical exhibit and a botanical lecture, he can visit buildings A and B on Thursday.

C) If John wishes to attend a painting class only, a mechanical exhibit only, and a botanical lecture only, he can visit Building A on Sunday, Building C on Tuesday, and Building B on Thursday.

D) If John wishes to attend a painting class only, a mechanical exhibit only, and a botanical lecture only, he can visit Building A on Monday, Building C on Monday, and either Building B on Thursday or Building C on Friday.

E) If Mary and John wish to meet, and they both plan to attend painting classes, they can do so on Sunday and Monday.

F) If Mary and John wish to meet, and they both plan to attend a mechanical lecture only, they can do so on Tuesday.

G) If John wishes to attend both a painting class on the weekend, as well as a mechanical exhibit during the week, he can arrive at his hotel on Saturday and check out on Monday after the mechanical exhibit.

H) If Mary wishes to attend a mechanical exhibit and two combined mechanical and botanical events, she can visit Building A on Sunday, Building A on Wednesday, and Building B on Friday.

I) If John wishes to attend a mechanical exhibit and a botanical lecture, as well as a painting class, he can do so on Wednesday.

The following statements are true:

A, D, E, F, G, H,

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Related Publications by A. M. Palmer

"Illness and the Movement of Time" (Essay)
(***Adelaide Literary Magazine***, December 25, 2022, Issue 56)

"On the Prevalence of Hunger" (Essay/Commentary)
(***Dissident Voice***, November 2, 2022)

"Systems of Abuse in American Civil Service: A Few Personal Reflections" (Essay/Commentary)
(***Dissident Voice***, March 28, 2022)

"The Digital Humanities: Ideas for Park Users" (Essay/Current Affairs)
(***Urban Park Culture***, Fall/Winter, 2021)

"Mass Communication at Midcentury" (Essay/Current Affairs)
(***Sharp Silhouette Literary Magazine***, Fall/Winter, 2021)

"Promising Ruins: The Life of Inner-City Parks in San Diego, California" (Essay/Current Affairs)
(***Sharp Silhouette Literary Magazine***, Fall/Winter, 2021)

"A Theory of Exchange" (Poem)
(***Littoral Magazine***, United Kingdom, September 21, 2021)

"White Pelican Migrations: Thoughts on Nature and the Movement of Time"
(***The Templeman Review***, University of Kent, Summer, 2021)

"A Donation of Cypress Pines" (Prose Poem)
(***La Piccioletta Barca***, University of Cambridge, Issue 33)

"Sepia Progressions of Form" (Poem & Photo Narrative)
(***Ink, Sweat and Tears***, United Kingdom, March 29, 2021)

"The Fallen Outlook" (Prose Poem)
(***Artifact Nouveau***: San Juaquin Delta College, Spring, 2021)

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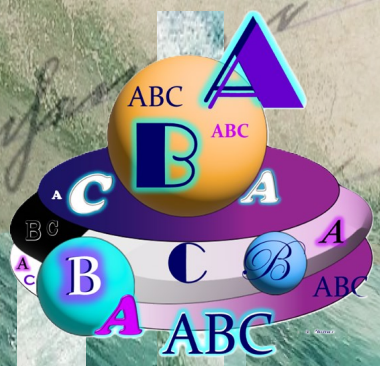
In the same way that Cubist painters depicted their subjects from numerous angles, capturing them in a single moment of time, the memoirist chooses overlapping themes to explore. Indeed, something about the texture of memory and time encourages artists to create in certain ways, revealing an image as it might have been, long ago.

("The Texture of Memory and Time")



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